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“Recognize Me”: An Analysis of Transgender Media Representation

By

Jackson McLaren

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Communication, Media and Film
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2018

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“Recognize Me”: An Analysis of Transgender Media Representation

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May 15, 2018

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

The representation of transgender people in popular media has been overwhelmingly problematic. Historical representations of transgender characters in fictional television have featured stereotypical and negative portrayals that do not accurately reflect the real experiences of transgender people. Both the quantity and quality of transgender representation across all forms of media is an issue.

This research examines two popular television shows that feature transgender characters. Using a mix methods approach of Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, the first four seasons of *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters* are examined. This research seeks to examine how the fictional transgender characters are constructed through their interaction with other characters and their place in the storyline. Of particular interest are the ways in which the transgender character is treated by others, the topic of conversations when the transgender characters are discussed, and whether they are victims of physical or psychological violence.

This research found that the improvement of representation in these shows is indicative of a trend towards more positive representation. The characters of Cole, Sophia, and Aaron are represented in some positive ways; however, it is noteworthy that all three continue to uphold the gender binary. Although there are still improvements that need to be made towards fair and complex representation, these characters' signal a step in the right direction.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to, first and foremost, all of those people who have supported me through my education. Mom, Mark, Riley, Grandma, Grandpa, Dad and Cathy: Thank you for always believing in me and supporting me. To Riley: Don't worry, you won't ever have to write a paper this long if you don't want to.

To Amber: Thank you for being here and supporting me, even while I am off finishing the next important thing I have to do. Your support means the world to me.

This paper is also dedicated to all of those people who struggle to fit into this world. To the transgender, genderqueer, gender-nonconforming people of the world: I see you. Your existence matters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank the M.A. cohort of 2016: Kami, Ashley, Erin, Harmony, Rohan, Darko, and John. Thank you for the endless discussions around pop culture and theory. I also appreciate every single one of you that bought me a coffee throughout the long semesters.

I would like to thank Kami for being my friend and theoretical sounding board. You have been an important support in my education. I could not have made it through this program without you.

This paper would not have been possible without the guidance and mentorship I have received from Dr. Susan Bryant. Thank you for the endless hours spent in discussion with you around what this paper would look like. I am very grateful that I was able to take so many classes with you, G.A. for you, and have you as my supervisor. I hope I can be as great of a professor as you are once this is all over.

Thank you to Dr. Brian Brown for your endlessly thought-provoking lectures during the classes I have taken with you. Thank you for your guidance and assistance in creating this project. Thank you to Dr. Vincent Manzerolle for our delightful video game conversations and your constant willingness to help out. Thank you to Dr. Kyle Asquith for being willing to step in as an internal reader at the very last second. Last but not least, thank you to Sharron Wazny for all you do for this program. Your hard work does not go unnoticed and your witty banter is so appreciated!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

CA	Content Analysis
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
GU	Girls United

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Popular media reflect a culture's most deeply ingrained beliefs. Popular culture is a way to express what media producers believe is a culture's most expressive and salient beliefs about the world around us. In North America, our media are as sacred to us as any religion. Since most North Americans have some sort of access to viewable media, whether that be television, film, or the internet, studying the effects of media representation is an important task for the field of Communication. As Penley (2013) states, "film is...a site of the production of meaning" (p. 112). Film and television are one important site where the production of meaning happens. One area of media coverage I am interested in is that of transgender people. Representation matters. More than this, complex representation matters. Complex representation encompasses representation outside of shallow stereotypical portrayals.

There is a dynamic relationship between popular culture and representation that manifests in four central ways. First, culture influences what kinds of storylines, characters, and challenging aspects of a television show are considered palatable for a wide range of audience members. Second, culture also influences what we as viewers are prompted to consider. Common tropes, or stereotypes, also allow viewers to be able to relate to what is happening in the shows we watch. Third, the way individuals are represented in popular culture, in turn, influences this same culture by addressing aspects of our existence that challenge us. And fourth, the quality of representations can be offset by the pure number of other representations of the same group. Thus, and in the present moment, examining not only the quantity (or number of instances) of transgender

representation, but also (and as important) their varying quality, is an especially important topic because negative portrayals of transgender people have historically overshadowed any positive or complex portrayals. Negative representations can be offset when there is a large number of representation of all kinds for that particular segment of the population. For instance, when a white cisgender male is portrayed in a negative fashion, there is an overwhelming number of other representations that offset this negative one. The less representation there is, the more important these rare examples of representation will be because they are all an audience ever sees.

I examine two popular television shows that feature transgender characters and storylines: *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters*. Both shows are set in the United States. *Orange is the New Black* deals with the American prison system while *The Fosters* deals with the American foster care system. The shows therefore address with interactions between transgender and non-transgender characters as well as how the state itself treats gender non-conforming people in these institutions.

For the purpose of this research, I analyze both shows using a combination of Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. The research question that guides my research is: how are transgender characters represented in two popular fictional mainstream television shows? Through this analysis I examine the current state of transgender representation. This research fits into the growing field of transgender literature across multiple academic fields and hopes to contribute to real-world efforts to ensure transgender people are treated equitably, starting with the way they are represented through some of the most popular and well-known television shows in North America.

The Shows

In the 2013 Netflix Original Series *Orange is the New Black*, the transgender character Sophia is a ward of the state in a woman's prison based in New York. From the beginning it is made very clear that she is a transwoman. She is present as a background/secondary character in Piper Chapman's main story. Sophia is also a woman of colour, which means the intersectionality of her identity puts her more at risk for harassment in a place such as prison.

The narrative of *Orange is the New Black* centers around the experiences of prison inmates that Piper meets during her stay. Events in the story include Piper trying to navigate her stay in prison, prison violence, and the relationships between inmates. Sophia's story starts with a glimpse into her pre-transition life. Through the episodes, the viewer also gets to know her wife, Crystal, and her son Michael. Sophia's storyline centers around the experience of being a Black transwoman in a woman's prison.

In comparison to *Orange is the New Black*, *The Fosters* features two young white transgender male characters. Set in San Diego, the show focuses on a lesbian couple who raise a diverse family. The couple, Lena and Steff Foster, have a total of five children throughout the four seasons. Brandon is Steff's biological son from her first marriage. Mariana and Jesus are the couple's first adopted pair of children. Finally, Callie and her younger brother Jude are taken in by Steff and Lena after they agree to foster another pair of children. Callie is one of the main protagonists in the show. The viewer initially meets Callie when Lena rescues her from a youth detention center. Shortly thereafter, Callie finds herself in a group home after running away from the Foster household.

The group home is where Callie meets Cole, the first transgender man to appear in the series. As Cole's story unfolds, the viewers learn that Cole is a transman who has been put in the foster care system because he was kicked out of his home. Cole reappears in a later season but is mainly a minor character at the beginning of the series. A second transgender character appears as a potential love interest for Callie in a later season. The second transman, Aaron, is not in the foster care system, but his character arc is unique because of the fact that Callie is attracted to him. This is important because it is rare that a transgender character has a healthy romantic story line, as the literature below will show. Both Aaron and Cole are somewhat minor characters up until the end of season four. It remains to be seen whether Aaron will become a main character or remain in the sidelines.

In summary, both shows are set in the United States and started airing in 2013. While *Orange is the New Black* features a middle-aged transgender woman of colour, *The Fosters* features two young white transgender men. This research paper focuses on the representation of all three characters throughout seasons one through four. The research focus is detailed below.

Research Focus

The major research focus is an analysis of the characters in their respective show. Since Cole and Sophia are both under the control of the state in some fashion, they have less control over their life. The way these particular government agencies treat transgender people is representative of broader societal views and how the state views their duty to transgender people. An example of this would be having policies in place to

protect transgender people from harassment or discrimination based on their gender identity.

An important consideration is that transgender people in prison and in the foster care system are not as protected as someone like Aaron who is not under state care. Sophia and Cole are wards of the state and do not always have a voice in how they are treated. Thus, one of the ancillary considerations threaded through my analysis is the following: what do these fictional representations tell us about what the Western world believes to be true about transgender people, especially transgender people who do not have financial or familial/social support because they are wards of the state? As mentioned, while this question is not answered below, it is one of the core queries guiding my work.

The population of this analysis is every episode between seasons one and four for both shows. The sample is every episode in which one of the trans characters is physically present or mentioned in. The fact that both shows started airing in the same year is critical for a number of reasons. First of all, both shows will potentially reflect societal norms and beliefs of that time (2013 onward) and will be therefore more comparable than two shows created in different years or in different locations around the world. They have both enjoyed unexpected success, as evidenced by the fact that they are still airing into a fourth season and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

Below, I detail the theoretical framework I use to examine how Sophia, Cole, and Aaron are represented in their respective shows. I start with an overview of key concepts and continue by exploring key aspects of gender theory and representation.

Important Concepts

Sex and gender can be understood as two different concepts. According to Schilt (2006), “biological processes are commonly understood to dictate this division into men and women” when it comes to sex (p. 4). Biological sex encompasses, for the most part, chromosomes, hormones, primary and secondary sex characteristics. In contrast to sex, gender has more to do with the cultural aspects of being male or female. Stryker (2008) states that gender is the “social organization of different kinds of bodies into different categories of people” (p. 11). More importantly, Stryker argues that we do not “come into the world with a pre-determined gender identity” (p. 4). Rather, gender identity is a culturally conditioned, albeit enduring sense of one’s gender. Stryker describes gender identity as a “subjective sense of fit with a particular gender category” (p. 13).

Transgender people feel as though their gender identity is opposite to that which is their biological sex. This is not to be confused with other gender-bending identities, such as cross-dressing, drag, or being intersex (having a combination of both sexual reproductive organs). Although certainly all transgender people do not feel the same way about their gender identities, the three characters analyzed in this study distinctly feel male or female. Stryker defines transgender as “people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender” (p. 1). It will be this definition of transgender

identity that I use moving forward. This definition acknowledges the cultural emphasis on both defining and conditioning gender identity and gender norms.

Butler's theory of gender performativity is important because it emphasizes cultural gender performance. People perform their gender according to cultural expectations about what it means to be male or female. Therefore, any sort of gender representation on screen (including transgender people) will be influenced and policed by what culture believes to be true about that gender. Butler (1999) proposes that "gender must...designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established...gender is...the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'precursive' prior to culture" (p. 10). In other words, culture structures what it means to be sexed but makes it appear as though one's sex comes with certain predetermined inherent characteristics (gender). Butler is influenced in her thinking, especially around subjecthood and the production of gender, by Foucault's (1990) theories. As noted by Butler, Foucault argues that "juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent (p. 2). Her theories about gender echo Foucault's argument that "by creating the imaginary element that is 'sex', the deployment of sexuality established one of its most essential internal operating principles: the desire for sex...it constituted 'sex' itself as something desirable" (p. 156). In the same way, Butler is asserting that the production of gender establishes gender as important and desirable. According to this production model by Butler and Foucault, a man should want to be masculine and a female should want to be feminine.

Butler also makes a point to state that the body itself is a "construction, as are the myriad 'bodies' that constitute the domain of gendered subjects" (p. 12). Since the

concept of a gendered subject is a powerful aspect of recognition (are you a boy or a girl?), to not be recognized would lead to some sort of negative response. This particular point builds on why issues of representation are so important. In general, Butler is arguing that discourse both gives power to and polices gender. Butler also draws heavily from Foucault's (1990) ideas about policing the body. The gendered body is policed via the cultural discourse surrounding gender. Most importantly, Butler suggests that the limits of gender possibility are "always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality" (p. 12). In this case, the Western world strongly believes in a binary between male and female. A gender binary means that there is only male or female; the two are mutually exclusive. Since so many other systems are predicated on a gender binary where maleness is assumed to be above and more important than femaleness, the discourse around innate and unchangeable biological gender differences is strong. In this discourse, sex automatically equals gender. Butler describes a more humanist conception of gender, in which gender is an attribute of the whole person, a "relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific set of relations" rather than dictated by biological sex (p. 14).

When gendered subjects are seen on screen, they are recognizable to us culturally as men or women and therefore we begin to unconsciously associate them with stereotypical attributes. Since persons "only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility," this creates a challenge for trans and gender queer representation (Butler, 1999, p. 22). It is harder to be intelligible if one is transitioning, androgynous, genderqueer, or a non-passing

transgender person. More complex representation could begin to combat this by transforming the culturally held idea of a binary-gendered subject.

Butler (1999) argues that ultimately gender is performative in that it constitutes the identity it is “purported to be” (p. 34). These performances make up our gender identity. Butler asserts that gender is the “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 45). West and Zimmerman (1987) also see gender as performative. They argue that the “‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production...we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations” (p. 126). They see gender as an everyday performance in which we partake to achieve a sense of gender identity. West and Zimmerman describe gender as a “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” (p. 126). In other words, there is power in being a recognizable gendered subject. West and Zimmerman also describe a Western gender binary where culture views “women and men as naturally and unequivocally defined categories of being” (pp. 127-128). It is hard to define the spaces between, outside of, or straddling the two categories of gender. Therefore, representations of those outside the gender binary are important but also challenging.

Importantly, the “action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (Butler, 1999, p. 191). This repetition is directed, policed, and influenced by culturally derived understandings of gender. To be sure, these are crude and simplistic

understandings of gender, predominantly confined to binary conceptions that do nothing to help us better understand the infinite number of possible gendered performances. Culture ingrains in us the belief that someone who looks like a man or a woman will have the corresponding sexual organs. This assumption then extends to the ways in which men and women are supposed to act. For instance, “doing gender consists of managing such decisions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender appropriate” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 135). Related to Butler’s assertion that the very act of performing gender creates gender, West and Zimmerman acknowledge that “doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys...once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender” (p. 137). When we continue to perform or act in this gendered way, we reinforce the essentialness of gender. West and Zimmerman argue that that “if we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category” (p. 146). Butler, West and Zimmerman all believe that acting according to the gender binary sustains the binary itself. Jagger (2008) makes the connection between Butler and West and Zimmerman explicit when she states that Butler shows that “gender...is an act in the sense that ‘doing’ gender involves ‘sustained social performances’ which involve the repetition of socially established meanings” (p. 26). There are two important points to take forward. The first is that everyday life involves ‘doing gender.’ The second is that we perform our gender according to social/cultural norms that proscribe what a man or woman should act and look like. The very act of doing gender establishes the genders themselves. Those that fall in between or outside of this binary, such as transgender or non-binary

individuals, are punished for not conforming. According to Butler, the “performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame” (p. 191). The more the traditional performance of gender is reenacted, the more it upholds the gender binary.

Understanding these theories of gender is important to understanding why representation of transgender people matters. First, the cultural pressure of performing gender according to a binary system leaves out and renders illegitimate people who fall outside of that binary. When those people are represented on screen, it is harder for them to be considered gender legitimate or understood. Therefore, Butler’s (1999) argument about the representation of women can be extended to the representation of transgender people: “representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects, on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said to either reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (p. 2). Butler concludes that the “qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended” (p. 2). Transgender people are politically fighting for their right to be subjects and therefore have more complex representations. In this research, the representation of transgender people is through popular media.

Representation in popular media is dictated by cultural belief systems. Fleras (2014) explores how mainstream media has often failed at depicting minorities. Importantly, mainstream media, such as popular television, is influenced by what Fleras calls the media gaze. Fleras (2014) addresses how “media gazes are known to conceal as much as they reveal, media representations are pivotal in defining what is normal,

acceptable, or desirable” (p. 3). The gaze is an important relationship between those on screen and the viewers. Fleras states that a “gaze entails looking with intent, in the process conferring meaning on the object of attention while establishing an asymmetrical power relationship between gazer and the gazed upon” (p. 36). Mulvey (2010) also explores her own concept of the gaze as a gendered relationship between a male gaze and female passive object. Transgender people are voyeuristically gazed at in a way that aligns with Mulvey’s theory of how the “cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking” (Mulvey, 2010, p. 202). Mulvey describes how looking at a cinematic piece (like film or television) stems from “curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surrounding” (p. 202). Viewers are invited to powerfully gaze at the screen and actively consume whatever image they see. Viewers are therefore the active party between themselves and the object of their gaze, which in this case is transgender people. Furthermore, hooks (1999) declares that the act of looking is always powerful (p. 307). Those who do the looking bring with them cultural baggage which affects how they will view the particular text. hooks also makes the point that “every narration places the spectator in a position of agency; and race, class and sexual relations influences the way in which this subjecthood is filled by the spectator” (p. 309). To extend this argument, viewers of the two shows will have some agency over what beliefs they bring into the viewing experience with them, which helps them understand the representation the particular show offers. There is power in looking and being looked at. This research will aim to dissect this powerful relationship of being looked at in the case of current transgender representation.

We can extend the idea of a gaze to the relationship between those who are viewing a representation and the representations on screen. Viewers of the show have the power to both view and deconstruct the representations on screen. Kaplan (2010) states that “representations...are mediations, embedded through the art form in the dominant ideology” (p. 209). Representations are powerfully mediated by cultural beliefs. Hall (1997) contends that representation in general is the use of language “to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully to other people” (p. 15). In particular, I focus on the representation in terms of the discourse surrounding these characters. Hall states that discourse “governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about” (p. 44). The discourses in the two shows can generally be described as how the characters are treated, discussed, and constructed in the series.

Representation of different gender identities specifically are important because “people’s experiences with reality are influenced by largely unconscious preconceptions and often irrational biases that frame what is seen or thought” (Fleras, 2014, p. 36). Representation helps influence these preconceptions. Media frame the representation of transgender people in a very particular way. According to Fleras (2014), “media representations of diversities and difference are invariably raced, gendered, Eurocentric, and classed” (p. 36). Moving beyond these narrow media representations is an important challenge for popular media.

Literature Review

Historically, the representation of transgender people on screen has been overwhelmingly negative. As Mocarski, Butler, Emmons, and Smallwood (2013)

explore, “when transgendered peoples do become mediated they are done so in marginalizing way...marginalization becomes a tactic to restabilize gender binaries” (p. 250).

In other words, when producers bother to include transgender characters, they are generally represented in ways that allow a binary conception of gender to go unchallenged. If transgender characters (or those who transgress gender binaries as defined by Stryker above) were depicted in complex ways rather than marginalized, this could challenge the whole idea of a gender binary itself. Therefore, there is more at stake than just whether transgender people are represented in an equitable way or not.

First of all, culture is an important factor in the way representations are constructed. Richardson (2016) explains that “the body is formed or built by the dictates of culture” (p. 10). Therefore, analyzing the representations of transgender people will presumably tell us something about cultural beliefs around gender and bodies. Keegan (2013) notes too that “trans bodies reveal the social processes that produce gender even as they may reassure us that one can ‘come home to’ or ‘arrive at’ one’s true gender in the end” (para. 1). This is related to the popular notion that transgender people cross neatly from one gender to the other. There is a distinct point of leaving (from the gender one is ‘born into’) and arrival (the gender one identifies with ‘on the inside’). This is the concept of transnormativity, which will be explored below. The journey during a physical transition is a less popular image onscreen than a ‘before transition’ or ‘after transition’ one.

When transgender representations (not necessarily actors/actresses) are included in television or film, it is in a few narrow ways. McInroy and Craig (2017) argue that “LGBTQ people have consistently been stereotyped as comic relief, villains and/or criminals, mentally and/or physically ill, and victims of violence” (p. 34). Rigney (2003) agrees, stating that “cinematic representations of transgender characters have been notorious for their portrayals of the transgendered as psychotic serial killers or as figures of fun and comic relief” (p. 4). Films such as *Silence of the Lambs* and *White Chicks* exemplify this trend. More recent representations such as *Glee* and *Transamerica* have started to take transgender representation in more positive directions. With the more liberal atmosphere of both *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters*, the three characters featured in this analysis continue to break out of this historical mold.

Representation in general can be a learning tool that reinforces cultural beliefs and norms or challenges them. For instance, Johnson (2016) explains that “transgender representations on screen serve as a mechanism through which transgender and cisgender people alike acquire a certain perception of what constitutes transgender authenticity and these representations may affect the identity processes of trans people” (p. 486). For transgender people, and especially transgender youth who have not yet fully developed a sense of themselves, these on-screen representations can help them develop their own sense of self as a gendered person. Cowan (2009) demonstrates that “constraining heteronormative assumptions and ideologies about sex and gender that underpin the dominant medico-legal and social discourses on all forms of transgenderism also shape the sexed/gendered lives of non-trans people” (p. 96). This means that the discourse around transgender people influences general discourses about gender. A complex

transgender character with androgynous characteristics tells the audience a different story about gender than one who transitions ‘neatly’ from one gender to the other.

Representation can be a powerful tool to help society understand what it means to be transgender in a way that takes away fear of the unknown.

An accompanying concern is that inclusion in mainstream media does not always equate to fair representation. This is an important concern as “media representations provide easily accessible representations of transgender people and thus serve as the culturally available knowledge that structures our understanding of transgender identities and experiences” (Johnson, 2016, pp. 485-486). Film and television can be an important medium in the representation of transgender people, as well as a great educational tool. Relatedly, Walters and Rehman (2013) explore how “educational delivery or instructional tools affect learning outcomes” in specific relation to transgender people (p. 338). In addition, Cowan (2009) points out how “film scholars have argued that it is important to bring to light the things that film can teach us about our legal and social world” (p. 97). Thus, not only can film and television be meaningful educational tools, they can also be a reflection of the legal and social realities in North America. Film and television can be seen as “window[s] into contemporary values and popular perceptions of social life” regarding transgender people (Cowan, 2009, p. 98). Since *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters* have enjoyed success, the above is even more meaningful as more people are watching these shows than less successful ones.

Another consideration is that producers and directors do not have ultimate control over where their films are shown, what rating they are given, or at times even who they will cast as actors. In addition, not all directors have unlimited material resources. Some

films or television shows have stricter budgets than others. Cowan (2009) argues that “movies...are...the most visible site of ideological struggle waged for access to and control of these representations” (p. 98). The actors we see on screen and the storylines featured are all the product of conscious decision making on the part of those in charge. The actors themselves (and very seldom transgender people) do not often get a say in the finished product. In addition, *Orange is the New Black*’s “Mature” rating means that it is not exactly a family-friendly learning opportunity.

While the average person does not have control over these production decisions, film and television can potentially be used for transgressive ends for people viewing the show. As Cowan (2009) explores, “trans movies can tell us something about the ways in which particular political discourses come to dominate sex/gender identity debates and construct good legal sexual subjects” (p. 98). Understanding why dominant discourse is constructed the way it is also allows us to understand how to change it. The more transgender representation continues to improve in terms of its complexity and nuance, the more varied and powerful these political conversations can become. I discuss common themes in dominant transgender representation below.

Transnormativity, Transgression, and ‘Fixing’ Transness

An important theme in the literature is the normative standard by which transgender people are judged. Johnson (2016) explores the concept of transnormativity, which is defined as the “ideological accountability structure to which transgender people’s presentation and experiences of gender are held accountable...[it] structures transgender experience, identification, and narratives into a hierarchy of legitimacy that is

dependent upon a binary medical model and its accompanying standards” (p. 466).

Transnormativity functions both to make transgenderism more understandable to viewers and make it less complex (or less transgressive). Especially in film, the emphasis on this medical/surgery model “creates a marginalizing effect for gender-non-conforming people who cannot or do not wish to medically transition” (Johnson, 2016, p. 466).

Transnormativity results in some transgender people’s stories seeming less legitimate than others. A ‘born in the wrong’ body narrative contributes to an ideal way of ‘being’ transgender. If this is the only narrative people ever hear, it makes it hard for others with different gender identities or trajectories to achieve the same representation or societal understanding.

It follows that the theme of the transgender character feeling like they are born in the wrong body will have a strong presence in a fictional representation. An interesting observation is the fact that male-to-female (MTF) transgender characters have historically been represented more than female-to-male (FTM) transgender characters. Rigney (2003) concludes that female-to-male characters have “gone largely unrecognized except in...a heterosexual format” (p. 5). The cultural eye has thus far been more fixed on MTF representation than FTM ones.

The other side of transnormativity is the concept of transgression. Anyone that does not conform to a strict two division (male or female) gender binary is considered transgressive. Transgression is related to discourse in that a transgression is something outside of a normative belief. Capuzza (2016) states that the “transgender body is a challenge to assumptions about gender because it does not fit tidily into either/or categories established” by society (p. 91). This could threaten the status quo that helps to

uphold other oppressive systems. An aspect that helps make the transgender character seem less transgressive is the fact that “trans films often [cast] an actor who fits the trans character’s birth sex rather than gender identity” (Abbott, 2013, p. 36). This means that if the character is a transgender man, the actor cast to play that character will be female. The crowd knows the biological identity of the actress, and this takes some of the power away from the representation of the character.

The real issue here is that there is an expectation that transgender people should be “either/or: pre-op or post-op, transvestite or transsexual...there are few representations in mainstream media of a transgender person who defies these categories” (Siebler, 2012, p. 75). In terms of media representation, there is no in-between. It is easier for our culture to understand someone who has neatly crossed from male to female or vice versa. It is harder for people to understand androgyny and transgender people who do not desire a medical or surgical intervention. This is intimately related to our cultural beliefs around gender binarism and what it means to be a man or woman. The ultimate transgression is to be unintelligible as a gendered subject (as explored by Butler above).

Another shallow stereotype is making transgender characters appear emotionally unstable. Keegan (2013) analyzes how the “fictional transgender figure has traditionally been marked as vulnerable to or productive of extreme emotional states, portrayed either as the emotive center of a narrative...as disturbed, erratic, or unstable...or psychotically violent” (para. 3). The lack of connection with a character who is mentally unstable (or just plain unlikeable) will most likely prevent the audience from building a solid understanding of what it means to be transgender.

The stigma that surrounds a transgressive representation is problematic for a number of reasons (Kolasinska, 2000, p. 175). First of all, this results in filmmakers who are less likely to include transgender characters. Second, when transgender characters are included they usually fall into the stereotypes that have already been utilized in previous films or television shows. As Baptista and Himmel (2016) show, the “dangers of representation...sustain norms that kill those who transgress them” (p. 640). Fictional representations can impact the real-life experiences of transgender people.

Ultimately, the transgressive potential of gender variant or transgender characters is mostly depoliticized by producers. Sandercock (2015) argues that producers “imbricate trans characters with hegemonic norms and render ‘transgender’ difference [as] ultimately resolvable-something that can be unproblematically folded into heteronormative familial and social structures” (p. 439). One way of doing this is to show a neat transition from one gender to the other. Since the “trans body is fashioned as one that ‘feels bad,’” the answer is to fix it (Sandercock, 2015, p. 441). As Keegan (2013) explores, “while transitional and non-conforming bodies may momentarily deconstruct the fiction of static gendered categories, transgender representation may also be manipulated to enforce these categories” (para. 1). In the end, the transgressive nature of being outside the gender binary is corrected. Keegan also believes that most popular representations “nearly always end with a reinforcement of a binary system of gender, which operates as a form of narrative resolution” (para. 6). This sentiment is echoed by Phillips (2006), who argues that the “dominant filmic images of transgender from 1950s to the end of the 1990s have in the end tended to reinforce stereotypical thinking on the

subject” (p. 165). These representations argue that to be pre-operational and transgender is something to be fixed.

Finally, the theme of fixing transness is related to both transnormativity and transgression. Fixing transness is the outcome of both of these concepts. The first meaning of fixing transness refers to being in a line of sight or analysis. For example, Sandercock (2015) explains that “by ‘seeing’...central trans characters...shows allow for nuanced representations as the sight of ‘real’ performers playing these roles adds a material aspect to trans representations...the implied cisgender gaze of these visual texts also ‘fixes’ transness...rendering trans people as knowable and legible curiosities” (p. 441). To be fixed means that transgender characters are objects/subjects to be ogled or gazed at. This can also educate viewers by making transgender people knowable. The second meaning is related to the belief that the transgender body needs to be fixed. To ‘fix’ the transgender body is to change the body to align with the mind. Johnson (2016) proposes that the “adherence to a medical model of transition emphasizes a *born in the wrong body* discourse and a *discovery narrative* of trans identity” (italics in original, p. 468). This ‘wrong body’ discourse is influenced by the medical model that sees transgender people as needing medical/surgical intervention to fix ‘nature’s mistake.’ This “essentialist, symptom-based model of trans experience creates the trope of trans people being *born in the wrong body*...and deters any alternative narrative of gender identity as fluid, emergent, processual, or constituted by social norms and influence” (Johnson, 2016, p. 469). To fix transness serves to uphold a gender binary because it assumes there is a clear point of disembarkation from one gender to a clear arrival at another.

By fixing transgender bodies, the gender binary is upheld. Note that the term fixing can be used in terms of repairing something that is ‘broken’, as well as fixing something in place so that it is unchangeable. Ultimately, transgender people and their representations are policed in order to perpetuate this gender binary. Sloop (2000) states that “a transgendered person becomes a foil in which the presuppositions of the gender and sexual norms of contemporary culture are reiterated and reaffirmed, in which ritual and taboo operate to assure this” (p. 169). Transgender people are represented in such a way so as to erase the multiple complexities of gender. Butler (1999) points out that the performance of gender serves to “maintain gender within its binary frame” (p. 191). A transnormative representation of transgender people does not deconstruct the much broader “illusion of an abiding gendered self” but inserts transgender people back into a stable binary (Butler, 1999, p. 191).

Depictions and Reactions of Transgender Youth

Transgender youth have a lot to gain from depictions of transgender characters. A fictional transgender character may be the first contact a young, gender-confused person has with the concept of transness. Such media could be the first place that LGBTQ youth go for information about their own identities when other resources are not available. McInroy and Craig (2017) argue that “media informs people’s knowledge of LGBTQ people and is often the first place that individuals...encounter LGBTQ identities” (McInroy & Craig, 2017, p. 33; McInroy & Craig, 2015, p. 606).

In a study that analyzes *Glee* and *Degrassi*, Sandercock (2015) aims to consider how the two shows “‘trans’ the landscape of youth television by bringing into focus

transgender lives, experiences and bodies” (p. 438). An important finding of this article is that LGBTQ youth characters in particular are characterized by “mostly negative or stereotypical representations...dominated by themes of vulnerability and victimization” (McInroy & Craig, 2017, p. 35). Similarly, McInroy and Craig found that participants felt media depictions of LGBTQ youth “poorly represent their own experiences” (p. 43). LGBTQ youth themselves therefore feel as though these narratives of victimization do not reflect their own lived experiences. This finding is similar to the findings that transgender characters are represented in stereotypical ways.

One common theme across the literature is the lack of depth or complexity in either the transgender characters or the narrative. McInroy and Craig (2017) found that young viewers believed the LGBTQ characters represented in fictional television shows were “predominantly one-dimensional and stereotypical” (p. 39). In addition, the trans representations “oversimplified sexuality and gender, acting to reinforce heterosexual, cisgender notions of gender presentation” (McInroy & Craig, 2015, p. 610). This is an example of the ways in which shows can improve in level of complexity. Another issue is that there are “few representations of LGBTQ people of colour, or with disabilities, or of different social classes” (McInroy & Craig, 2017, p. 40). This is an issue for the level of complexity of characters as well as the relatability of transgender people who are not white, middle-class, or able-bodied.

The Bathroom Problem

The ‘bathroom problem’ for trans people can be broadly described as the issue of which bathroom to use and the fallout that comes from those choices. For instance, if a

pre-operative trans person who does not quite pass uses the restroom of their chosen gender identity, they may face harassment. Sandercock (2015) argues that “public bathroom use is highly political for gender minorities” (p. 445). This bathroom problem is demonstrated in the two shows Sandercock analyzes, *Glee* and *Degrassi*. Sandercock states that both shows “demonstrate awareness of the political nature of public bathroom use as both Adam and Unique are assaulted in bathrooms at school” (p. 445). In the show *Degrassi*, transgender teen Adam is assaulted in the school bathroom. The solution is that the school staff will escort him to use the handicap bathroom. Sandercock concludes that “the consequence that Adam, as a victim, should be segregated, underhandedly promotes a hierarchy of legitimacy and acceptance wherein gender-conforming, heterosexual cis men and women...accrue privilege. Their concerns and their spatial freedoms are privileged while the concerns and locations of others are marginalized” (pp. 447-448). The bathroom problem is widely configured in transgender representation as it is a part of everyday life. This problem is also complicated by whether a trans person chooses to undergo surgery and/or hormone replacement therapy.

The Theme of Deception

In popular culture, a person who is transgender and passes well in society is often depicted as deceptive. The term ‘passing’ refers to transgender people who “do not disclose their transitions to new friends or coworkers” (Schilt, 2006, p. 15). Another term for passing is ‘going stealth.’ As Schilt (2006) contends, the term stealth “encompasses ‘covert’ and ‘clandestine,’ synonyms that are in closer keeping with a view that transitions are part of a private history that may be disclosed in some circumstances and

not in others” (p. 15). To some, a person who is perceived as male or female but does not have the assumed genitals to match that gender is ‘being deceptive’.

This sense of hiding or flying below the radar is often quite prevalent in films featuring transgender characters. This is one reason why the popular ‘exposure’ scene (where the transgender body is exposed to the viewer and other characters) is so frequent in films or shows where transgender characters pass as their preferred gender. The deceiving transsexual is considered one who “successfully passes as the required sex but is therefore a very threatening character” (Richardson, 2016, p. 128). The idea of a transgender character going to great lengths to ‘deceive’ potential partners is particularly alarming to heterosexual male characters in film and television. As Richardson (2016) explores, “associated with the representation of this type of transsexual is the much anticipated ‘moment of truth’ when the ‘real’ sex of the transsexual is revealed and the illusion of femaleness stripped away” (p. 129). The viewer is unashamedly invited to gaze at the genitals of the transsexual character along with the other characters privy to such an unveiling moment. Deception is therefore intimately linked with the exposure scene.

The ‘Exposure’ Scene

The exposure scene can be defined as the moment in the media text in which the “transgender status is suddenly disclosed through either a violent removal of clothing or through voyeurism abound in both popular films and television” (Keegan, 2013, para. 13). This scene is set up between the active gaze of the audience, the other characters the audience is meant to identify with, and the passive victim of the exposure being gazed

upon (Mulvey, 2010). This scene both grants the viewers wish for pleasurable looking and satisfies the viewers curiosity (p. 202).

The viewer is invited to look at the transsexual body, along with the characters present for the exposure scene. The use of such a scene results in the “violent exposure and ridicule of the trans body” (Keegan, 2013, para. 13). An exposure scene is both violent and intrusive. It is common in trans films because of the need of mainstream audience to ‘know’ what a transgender person has under their clothes. Richardson (2016) explains there is often an “overdetermined interest in the genitals of the transsexual subject, so much so that this interest often crosses the boundaries of public politeness” (p. 129). The exposure scene is therefore important to the audience who ‘needs to know’ what the transsexual character has in their pants.

The politics behind the exposure of FTM characters versus MTF characters is also characteristically different. Siebler (2012) makes the case that the “viewing of the trans characters’ bodies is not [central], unless the actor playing the trans person is female. This double standard regarding which bodies are on display-which bodies the voyeuristic audience is allowed to gaze upon-and which are not, is reinforced with films featuring FTM trans characters” (p. 89). The issue of which trans bodies are exposed and how is very political. The politics of transgender exposure are clearly rooted in other systems of oppression, such as sexism.

A related theme of the exposure scene is the mirror scene. Keegan (2013) states that “trans characters endlessly stand in front of mirrors, nude and in various stages of undress, examining themselves with a range of negative emotions running from dismay

to wistful melancholy to pure disgust” (para. 22). This allows the audience to gaze at the transgender body as they please. Transgender characters are objectified, but not necessarily sexualized as seen in the following sections. In addition, when they are gazing unhappily into the mirror there is a clear narrative being developed here. The negative emotions associated with mirror scenes foreclose any other possibility than the transgender person feeling as though they are born in the wrong body. There can be nothing about their body that they actually like. In turn, this reinforces aspects of transnormativity referenced to above and builds the narrative that transgender people could never been seen as a potential romantic partner.

Transgender People as Victims of Violence

Transgender films and shows often portray the trans characters as victims of violence. McInroy and Craig (2017) found that viewers believe that “LGBTQ young people in traditional media were depicted as weak, insecure, and bullied” (p. 39). The strength and resilience of trans characters is not often depicted. Another form of violence is erasure (omission) altogether. The complete lack of acknowledgment or existence is in itself an act of violence. McInroy and Craig discover that “bisexual and transgender identities were...particularly noted for being almost completely invisible...particularly transgender men” (p. 40). When transgender people are represented, it has predominantly been transwomen. The landscape is changing with the introduction of trans male characters on shows like *Glee* and *Degrassi*.

Transgender characters are often the victims of physical, psychological, and sexual violence as already discussed by Sandercock (2015). As shown above, both teen

trans characters in *Glee* and *Degrassi* are assaulted in school bathrooms. The problem with shows like *Glee* is that “the seriousness of discrimination in *Glee* is often undercut by the excessive humour used to cast these actions as satirical commentary” (Sandercock, 2015, p. 446). The humour serves to depoliticize the scene while protecting the show itself. This draws critical attention away from scenes in which assault on a transgender character is featured. Perhaps most importantly, violence is used as a warning to those who transgress the gender binary. One way in which transgender people are particularly vulnerable is around their romantic (or lack of) relationships with other people. They are open to harassment or denial when pursuing people they are attracted to. This issue is discussed below.

Romance with Trans People

One powerful aspect of representation is the absence of any sort of fulfilling sexual or romantic plotline involving transgender characters. Abbott (2013) describes this absence as the “trans/romance” dilemma. Abbott sees this as the fault of the director. She states that “too often narrative expectation is subverted and romantic contact is stifled because the filmmaker fears the audience will read the trans character’s gender identity as inauthentic and the romance as transgressive” (p. 32). In other words, Abbott’s research found that filmmakers do not want their storyline to challenge the status quo.

In the world of youth LGBTQ representation, the trans/romance dilemma is strong. As Sandercock (2015) explores, “dating is often cast as challenging and awkward for teenagers; however, *Glee* and *Degrassi* suggest it can be more difficult for trans youth” (p. 441). The teen romance drama in the two shows is highly problematic because

the characters are mostly seen as unlovable. Sandercock argues that the portrayal of trans romance in *Glee* is “no more respectful or sensitive than those Abbott outlines, and perhaps more problematic” (p. 442). As with other media, *Glee* avoids showing the trans character Unique in a romantic or sexual situation. In *Degrassi*, Sandercock shows how Adam is demasculinized by his partner who sees him as the “best of both worlds, boyish and girlish” (p. 443). Neither of these more progressive shows manages to resolve this trans/romance dilemma.

A major issue with transgender representation is that the transgender character is usually played by a cisgender person. An implied message would be that an attraction to the on-screen character would then be considered homosexual. For instance, Hilary Swank was cast to play transman Brandon Teena in the film *Boy's Don't Cry*. The casting of Swank “demonstrates the visual impact of shots of the trans body as ultimately, it is the visual affirmation of Hilary Swank’s female body that negates Brandon Teena’s maleness and recategorizes his romance with a woman as homosexual” (Abbott, 2013, p. 36). As Siebler (2012) notes, the “issue of casting nontrans people to play trans people is an abiding critique” (p. 92). This complicates the issues of romantic and sexual attraction even further.

When shows do try to break this mold, they are still constrained by the fear of transgression. The show *Dancing with the Stars* featured Chaz Bono as one of the dancers. As Mocarski et al. (2013) observes, Bono was both presented to viewers in a particular way and given a small chance to autonomously present himself. The way that Bono was represented on national television has wider implications for how transgender people are understood. For instance, instead of being seen as a healthy sexual being,

Bono was represented as both a stand-in for other transgender people and as not attractive. Further to this, his relationship with his wife was then downplayed to avoid interrupting the unsexed narrative with which they paint Bono. It would imply that trans people are unlovable and sexually unattractive. The unsexed nature then makes it hard to involve the transgender character/individual in a healthy (or any type at all) romantic relationship. In a sense, both real life transgender people and their fictional representations are depicted as people who could never have a sex life or healthy relationship. Whether the transgender person has had surgery or not further complicates this issue.

Some Assembly Required: The Question of Surgery

As discussed above, the term fixing can be used to repair something that is 'broken'. This relates to the idea that surgery is considered a solution to a misalignment between body and gender identity. Surgery for transgender people is often seen as a necessary step during their transition. Keegan (2013) explores how the film *TransAmerica* ends in a way that "problematically posits surgery as the solution to the bad feelings of being transgender, ignoring the stark political and economic inequalities that continue to structure transgender oppression...[this] suggests that being trans is equivalent to desiring surgery...drastically reducing the complexities of transgender experience and identification" (para. 17). This also erases the identities of those who choose to forego surgical options. Surgery is seen as the last vital stage in the transgender journey. Siebler (2012) argues that what we internalize from stereotyped representations of transgender people who have had surgery and take hormones is that these steps are required to "be a content transqueer and that means being a masculine male or feminine

female” (p. 76). Historically, most transgender representation features characters who either desire or have already completed some sort of medical transition. There are rarely representations of people in the middle of their transition.

Surgery ultimately allows the transgender person to feel as though they can be a masculine man or feminine woman. The desire to perform on one side of the binary or the other via surgical options is reflective of the pressures of doing gender. Butler (1999) is influenced by Foucault in stating that the “category of sex...is a production of a diffuse regulatory economy of sexuality” (p. 25). Having surgery as a transgender person is a part of the regulatory economy of gender in that certain body parts and features are considered to be masculine or feminine. The transnormativity of sexual reassignment surgery polices the transgender person into wanting to change their bodies to match with a normative gender framework.

Transgender Inmates

The prison system is one part of a wider system that punishes individuals who fall outside of prescribed gender norms. Rosenblum (1999) explains that the problems faced by “transgendered prisoners signal the grave dangers facing all of us in a wide array of social structures” (pp. 502-503). The way in which transgender people are treated in prison is telling of the harm caused by the wider prison system. As explored by Browne (2004) “transgender and transsexual individuals contest the ‘natural’ connections between sexed embodiments and sexed lives” (p. 333). The very presence of transgender people in prison pushes against the institutionalized boundaries of the gender binary. This leads to transgender prisoners being at risk for greater levels of harassment both from

staff and other inmates. As Foucault (2004) has explored, the prison polices the body in a very particular way. He states that “power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (p. 98). The prison combines its own mechanisms of policing with the kind of gender policing happening daily beyond its walls. Both forms of policing are then reflected by, and refracted through, the products of culture (such as television) so as to have a subsequent impact on viewing audience.

The enduring culture of having a clear divide between men and women in prison is based on the fact that “in public discourse...a major assumption still stands that individuals are at base, ‘sexed’” (Sloop, 2000, p. 168). This assumption leads to an understanding that there should be one of two places all non-law-abiding citizens should go: a women’s prison or a men’s prison. Unfortunately, there is seldom room in institutional policy for anyone who is not cisgendered. Prison is just one part of a larger system that discriminates against those who are not White, cisgender male, or heterosexual.

Transgender people are more likely to experience a range of difficulties that increases their chance of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. Since most sexual reassignment surgeries are not covered by healthcare, one way in which transgender people may try to acquire money to transition is through illicit activities such as prostitution. Campbell and Holding (2015) address how “trans people are disproportionately represented in all forms and levels of jail and prison as a result of

systematic legal, racial, and economic marginalization and active targeting by police and citizens” (p. 205).

Once transgender people are in prison, they come up against a mostly unyielding culture. Tarzwell (2006) argues that transgender inmates “find themselves at the mercy of a hyper-gendered system: prisoners are sorted into sex-segregated facilities where traditional gender roles are strictly enforced” (pp. 176-177). In the case of Sophia in *Orange is the New Black*, she is thankfully put into a woman’s only prison. However, this comes with its own set of challenges. The space of the prison itself is influenced by outside culture and the ways in which prison officials seek to control the inmates inside of the prison walls. Browne (2004) contends that it is important to understand “space as continually (re)created” (p. 332). As transgender prisoners come in, they have the potential to disrupt an intensely sexed culture. Most, if not all, North American prisons sort transgender individuals based on their genitals. As Tarzwell (2006) explores, “in the absence of policies specifically addressing the needs of gender-transgressive individuals in such a gendered system, transgender prisoners are routinely forced into dangerous placements and denied gender-affirming medical care” (p. 177). An additional finding in the literature is the fact that the “sexual misconduct of prison staff is disproportionately directed at lesbian and transgender prisoners...while men’s prisons are hyper-masculinized in a way that is equally inappropriate for transgender individuals” (Tarzwell, 2006, p. 178). In sum, transgender prisoners are even more at risk than general population.

In her general analysis of *Orange is the New Black*, Caputi (2015) claims that “diversity in representation does matter” (p. 1130). The inclusion of a transgender woman

in a show about a women's prison is politically powerful. The show itself attempts to be diverse and political, which Caputi states "must be recognized as a reflection of the disproportionate over representation of marginalized women incarcerated in what activists call the prison industrial complex" (p. 1131). In the analysis of the show, Caputi examines how Sophia serves to humanize transgender people as opposed to demonizing them. The producers do not make her character as political as they could have. However, the representation of Sophia is an adequate start for representing transgender inmates.

Transgender Youth in Foster Care

The first transgender character the viewer meets in *The Fosters* is in a group home. Callie meets Cole at a female group home entitled *Girls United*. The show is set in California, which is the "only state that has adopted laws that explicitly protect LGBT youth from discrimination in the state's foster care system...and [which states] that LGBT children should not be 'subjected to discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity'" (Ashley, 2014, p. 52). The juridical context of this television show is unique in that it unfolds within these protective laws. While the hope is that the law will protect transgender youth in foster care, in actuality this is not always the case.

Children in foster care are subjected to more challenges if they identify as a sexual minority or as transgender. Ashley (2014) declares that LGBT children in foster care are "subjected to gender challenges...[S]ociety has constructed traditional gender stereotypes, and the foster care system forces young boys and girls and members of the LGBT community to conform to these gender stereotypes" (p. 48). They are strictly

controlled in their gender expression. The outcome of this is that most children do not have the freedom to explore their gender identity in a healthy way. Ashley argues that “LGBT children are bullied more often than other children because they do not conform to the traditional gender stereotypes” (p. 49).

Like prison, foster care takes away the autonomy of the individuals in that institutional system. The atmosphere of a foster care setting depends on whether the youth is placed in an individual foster home or in a group home. According to Love (2014) “transgender youth in foster care face the daily danger of physical violence at the hands of other youth living in the same group homes. Staff who work in these homes do not effectively protect the physical safety of transgender youth in their care” (p. 2267). Love (2014) reports that “transgender youth are more likely to be placed in group homes than foster family homes... because of transphobia both on the part of people within the foster care system, such as social workers and foster parents, and in society at large” (pp. 2274-2275).

Like transgender individuals on the outside, there are certain spaces that are universally risky for transgender youth in foster care. Love (2014) argues that “transgender individuals are at their most vulnerable when in their bedrooms and bathrooms (i.e., when naked or sleeping) because these are situations in which others are most likely to discover that they are transgender and attack them for that reason” (pp. 2268-2269). The bathroom (both public and private) is a space fraught with risk. In a group home setting, personal space is a commodity not always available. As Love notes, “one of the biggest problems that transgender youth in foster care currently face is the lack of safety in group homes” (p. 2278). The transgender youth may be outed upon their

arrival or they will be outed in the spaces of the bathroom or the bedroom where eventually they must take their clothes off. Due to the fact that being transgender is “more visible than being LGB...transgender individuals are more likely to be outed to their peers and thus more likely to face bias-related harassment and violence” (Love, 2014, p. 2279). In addition, since “there is an acute lack of LGBTQ-only group homes,” there are not many safe places for transgender youth to end up while they are wards of the state (Love, 2014, p. 2281). With gendered group homes comes challenges around where the best place to put a transgender foster child is.

The concern with representations like *The Fosters* is whether they are an accurate representation of what happens in foster care. Chmielecki (2015) is a writer who has been in foster care himself. He states that “most foster care themed projects are derived from the writer’s imagination, with little to no input from the world of which they write. The *Fosters* were reaching out to people and organizations in the foster care industry...they were gathering information about the reality of care” (para. 10). The directors were therefore taking care to represent the realities of foster care as carefully and accurately as possible. Since transgender children account for between four to ten percent of the foster care population, they are overrepresented in this particular system (Ashley, 2014, p. 49).

The parallels between transgender people in foster care and those in the prison system are strong. Transgender people are more likely to come into contact with the prison system than the average cisgender person. Transgender youth are additionally more likely to come into contact with the foster care system. According to Ashley (2014), “the Court recognized that the state has a duty to protect incarcerated persons just as the state also has a duty to protect a child that has been placed in foster care that is operated

by state actors” (p. 51). Although the State is technically liable, it is hard for both transgender inmates and transgender youth in foster care to advocate for themselves. Good representation in these two areas will help people understand the reality of the day to day lives of transgender inmates and children in foster care.

Some Hope in Representation

Throughout the literature, there is some hope of seeing increasingly positive representation of transgender people. For example, Richardson (2016) notes that *TransAmerica* is one of the few trans films that addresses the “issue of transsexuality with a degree of sensitivity” (p. 132). The film addresses the “details of Bree’s struggle, rather than resorting to generalisations or stereotypes, while representing this within a classical narrative framework” (Richardson, 2016, p. 144). This allows for a slightly more complex characterization of Bree as a person, not just as a transsexual. Similarly, Penn (2015) explores how the film *Boy Meets Girl* is more progressive than other transgender depictions. This film, unlike others, casts a transgender woman in the role of the transgender character. Other important positive aspects include a small town that supports the transgender character, and a transgender character who is “happy and well-adjusted” (Penn, 2015, p. 142). In the opinion of Penn, this character is clearly more complex than other transgender representations.

In addition, McInroy and Craig (2017) find that the LGBTQ youth representations that are seen on television gave viewers a “sense of possibility simply because they were seeing LGBTQ identities depicted” (p. 38). McInroy and Craig (2015) also point to the fact that some viewers did indicate they felt that there was the “presence of more

complex and authentic characters in offline media” (p. 611). Further to this, participants believed these representations helped generally increase “representation of and knowledge of transgender people” (McInroy & Craig, 2015, p. 612). Ultimately, it is possible for trans characters to move toward more complexity. As Richardson (2016) states, there is a possibility for resistance, and that “rebellion always begins with the body” (p. 14). It is my hope that my research contributes to discovering how this is possible.

Summary

This literature review has highlighted some of the most relevant research written to date on transgender representation in the media. Many of the articles highlight that transgender representation is still stereotypical, overly simplistic, and riddled with negative themes. Some of the negative themes explored in the literature are the enactment of violence on the transgender body, the need to reveal/expose, and the subversion of transgressive possibilities. In most transgender representation, there is a transnormative theme of abiding to a medical framework that sees surgery as necessary to fixing transness. This research is important because the gender binary is an oppressive system that affects everyone. By starting to unravel the ways transgender people are policed and represented through popular media, we can begin to learn how to fight this oppressive system. This research seeks to contribute to filling the literature gaps in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

Methods

The guiding research question in this paper is analyzing how transgender characters are represented in two popular mainstream television shows. Some underlying assumptions guided me in drafting this particular question. As the literature review shows, transgender representation has been mostly negative when it does happen. The assumption is that there will be more negative representations than positive or neutral ones. The term popular mainstream television also connotes a wide viewership of the television shows. Netflix Canada has a wide range of viewers, although this does not guarantee that those who subscribe to the Netflix Canada service will watch *Orange is the New Black* or *The Fosters*. The point of the wording of this research question is that the analysis examines shows that are easily accessible to a wide range of viewers on a number of different devices.

The research design used a mixed methods approach, utilizing a Content Analysis (CA) adapted from Capuzza and Spencer (2017) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) adapted from Huckin (1997). The combination of the two methods allowed for both a breadth and depth of data relating to the quantitative and qualitative representation on-screen of all three transgender characters. As the literature review shows, it is important to examine both whether transgender representation is becoming better in the amount of representation and in the quality.

Capuzza and Spencer (2017) were successful in utilizing their Content Analysis with transgender representation. The data their method produced was powerful. Adding

CDA to my method allowed me to delve deeper into the qualitative aspect of transgender representation. The combination of CDA and CA allowed me to examine the political nature of how Cole, Sophia, and Aaron are represented in *The Fosters* and *Orange is the New Black*.

The first stage of my methodology was a coded Content Analysis. Content Analysis is a “research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The ultimate goal is to “provide knowledge and understanding” of what is being studied (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). I designed a coding schedule and manual based off of the one used by Capuzza and Spencer (2017). My CA specifically looked at how the transgender characters are represented via their physical descriptions, social cues, social categories, and the ways in which other characters speak about them or treat them. The coding categories, as adapted from Capuzza and Spencer, were: i) casting, ii) visibility, iii) identity, iv) relevance of character, v) embodiment, and vi) social interaction. Some of the questions utilized by these researchers were kept, while others were omitted or changed to suit the purpose of this research. Additional questions were added to ensure the categories were exhaustive and mutually exclusive (see Appendices A, B, C and D for coding sheets).

The category codes were further divided into questions and split into two separate coding sheets. A series coding sheet was created to use as a series encompassing document for each character. This sheet featured broad questions that only needed to be asked once and not for each episode. A second coding sheet was then developed with some overlapping questions used for each episode. The i) *casting* category included

whether the character is played by a transgender or cisgender actor/actress. The ii) *visibility* category included: how many episodes the character physically appears in, how many episodes the character is mentioned in, how much screen time the character has in total where they are physically present on screen, and how many times the characters' transgender identity is discussed. This last question was broken down into whether the characters' identity is discussed positively, negatively, or neutrally. The iii) *identity* category included: name of character, how the character identifies (gender identity), what race/ethnicity they appear to be, their approximate age, and their perceived/inferred or stated sexuality. The iv) *relevance of character* category included: how many episodes the persons transgender identity is a source of narrative conflict, how many episodes the transgender characters identity contributes to the storyline in a major way. Narrative conflict is defined as the transgender identity being the source of a tension in the narrative. An example of narrative conflict is if the transgender identity of the character specifically was the root of them being harassed. Similarly, contributing to the storyline in a major way would be when a significant portion of that episode is dedicated to explaining or expanding on a transgender character's identity. The v) *embodiment* category included: number of scenes where language misgenders the transgender character, times the character is correctly gendered, times characters birth name is used, episodes where someone engages in a "wrong body" discourse, episodes where someone discusses the genitals of the transgender character, episodes where the physical attractiveness of the transgender person is discussed, and times the trans body is revealed. The vi) *social interaction* category included: who does the transgender person interact with, are they in a romantic or sexual relationship, and are they a victim of physical or

psychological violence during the episode. The series coding sheet encompassed the entirety of the four seasons of each show and each of the three characters had their own series coding sheet. The series coding sheet consisted of 23 questions. The episode-by-episode coding sheet was utilized for each episode in the sample. The episode-by-episode coding sheet had 20 questions.

The entire population was every episode in each of the four seasons of *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters*. The sample I used for the Content Analysis was every episode of *Orange is the New Black* where Sophia was physically present and/or mentioned. The sample size for *Orange is the New Black* was 33 episodes. The sample for the Content Analysis also included every episode of *The Fosters* where Aaron and/or Cole were physically present and/or mentioned. The sample size for *The Fosters* was 21 episodes. As previously stated, each episode in the sample was coded using an episode coding sheet adapted using some of Capuzza and Spencer's (2017) key questions.

After the Content Analysis was complete, I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to delve deeper into selected scenes from the series. This second stage of the method utilized a Critical Discourse Analysis method adapted from Huckin's format (1997) combined with van Dijk's (1993) emphasis on CDA being political. Van Dijk (2004) states that CDA combines "'solidarity with the oppressed' with an attitude of opposition and dissent against those who abuse text and talk in order to establish, confirm or legitimate their abuse of power...CDA is biased-and proud of it" (p. 96).

The CDA built on the data collected using the first stage Content Analysis. I selected 11 key *Orange is the New Black* episodes and 10 for *The Fosters* (five for each

character) to undergo Critical Discourse Analysis. The episodes were chosen based on the past research highlighted in the literature review. Following from the issues raised in the literature review (violence against transgender people, exposure scenes, the trans/romance dilemma, and the experiences of prison/foster care to name a few), the most salient examples were selected.

The episodes were approached first as a typical audience member, as per Huckin's (1997) approach to CDA. After approaching the text as a typical audience member, I approached the text as a whole. The text as a whole is the entirety of the episode. Huckin recognizes different aspects of the text in this stage, such as i) genre, ii) framing, iii) foregrounding, vi) backgrounding, v) omission and vi) presupposition. According to Huckin (1997), identifying the genre of a text "allows the analyst to see why certain kinds of statements appear in the text and how they might serve the purposes of the text-producer, as encoded in that genre" (p. 83). Framing refers to "how the content of the text is presented, what sort of perspective (angle, slant) the writer is taking" (Huckin, 1997, p. 83). Framing emphasizes certain points by pushing them into the foreground while backgrounding de-emphasizes others (Huckin, 1997, p. 84). Omission involves leaving aspects completely out of the episode. Presupposition is the "use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative" (Huckin, 1997, p. 84). It is at this 'text as a whole' level where I examined the visuals and ensuing dialogue in the show. This level also looked at the text on a more macro level. Looking at the text on a sentence by sentence level was the next stage of this method. Thus, it assumes a written text. Taking the televisual context of my data into consideration, I substituted a scene by scene approach for the sentence by sentence

approach. I looked at what subjects were topicalized when characters are in conversation with or about transgender characters. Other aspects I looked at are foregrounding, agent-patient relations, omission, presupposition, and insinuations. Topicalizing is a type of foregrounding at the sentence (or scene) level. As Huckin (1997) states, topicalization is foregrounding in that “in choosing what to put in the topic position, writers create a perspective, or slant, that influences the reader’s perception” (p. 85). Agent-patient relations has to do with who has agency and who does not. Huckin (1997) argues that “many texts will describe things so that certain persons are consistently depicted as initiating actions...while others are depicted as being...recipients of those actions” (p. 85). The presupposition on the sentence level is very similar to the text as a whole level. Lastly, insinuations are “comments that are slyly suggestive” (Huckin, 1997, p. 86).

The next level of Huckin’s method is the word level. As Huckin argues, “at a more detailed level of reading, one can take note of the additional, special meanings (or connotations) that certain words and phrases (lexis) carry” (1997, p. 86). This part of the method was powerful and political. Transgender representation features those individuals who use powerful slurs and insults against transgender people. It was at the level of the word that these particular instances were analyzed. Specifically, I looked for connotations and labels, which “carry unavoidable connotations” (Huckin, 1997, p. 86).

The social context is an important attribute of Huckin’s CDA. CDA importantly acknowledges that texts are created in a “real-world context with all of its complexity” (Huckin, 1997, p. 78). By including the social context, CDA as a method incorporates the political and social situations that influence the shows themselves. Huckin states that CDA as a method is context-sensitive, in which it “takes into account the most relevant

textual and contextual factors, including historical ones, that contribute to the production and interpretation of a given text” (p. 78). The social context includes important events (historical or current) that influence or reflect main points of the text itself. For example, the social context of North American rights and laws around the protection of transgender people will be influential in the two shows. Huckin notes that any text is the product of “discursive practices, including production, distribution, and interpretation, which themselves are embedded in a complex mosaic of social practices” and contexts (p. 80). The social context the shows are created in influence how the representations themselves are produced. This is why the social context is an important aspect of analysis for CDA.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Results

Content Analysis Results

Orange is the New Black

The character of Sophia is played by Laverne Cox, who identifies as a transgender woman. Out of 52 episodes across four seasons, she physically appears in 33 and is mentioned in 41 episodes. The total amount of show time covered in the analysis is 30 hours and 33 minutes. Of this time, Sophia is present for two hours, 17 minutes and 43 seconds. Her transgender identity is discussed a total of 43 times. Sophia is self-identified throughout the series both as female and as a transwoman. She is portrayed as being in her mid-40s and she is African-American. Her sexuality is never explicitly stated, but she is married to a woman and they have a child together.

Sophia's transgender identity is a source of narrative conflict in six episodes. Her trans identity contributes to the storyline in a major way during six episodes. Throughout the show, she is misgendered 46 times and correctly gendered 82 times. There are six times in which a wrong body discourse is used in relation to Sophia being transgender. Her birth name is used once throughout the series.

One particularly powerful result of this analysis is the number of times that Sophia's genitals are discussed. Throughout the series, her genitals are discussed 26 times. Her physical attractiveness is discussed three times. The following three episodes feature a scene in which Sophia's body is revealed in some fashion: Season one, Episode

three; Season two, Episode two; Season four, Episode four. Although she is married, her imprisonment makes it so that she cannot participate in a romantic or sexual relationship. She is a victim of some variation of psychological violence in eight episodes. In addition, Sophia is a victim of physical violence in two episodes.

The Fosters

Cole

Cole is a minor character who is featured early on in the show when Callie is sent to a group home. The character of Cole is played by a transgender actor. He is featured in a total of 10 episodes and is mentioned in 11. The total screen time for the episodes used in my analysis is 7 hours and one minute. Cole features in one hour, 10 minutes and 28 seconds of this total time. His transgender identity is discussed 16 times throughout the seasons in which he is present. Cole self identifies as a man and transman. In addition, he is white and 15 years old when Callie first meets him.

Cole is romantically interested in both Callie and another housemate in the group home, so the narrative seems to construct him as straight. However, his sexuality is never openly discussed. His trans identity is both a source of narrative conflict and contributes to the story line in a major way in three episodes. Cole is misgendered 13 times and correctly gendered 52 times. Throughout the series, someone engages in a wrong body discourse three times. Cole's birth name is used once near the beginning of the series. His genitals are discussed once. His physical attractiveness is never discussed by himself or any of the other characters. Cole's body is revealed once in Season Two Episode eight. He is seen to be in a romantic relationship once but does not appear in a sexual

relationship. He is the victim of psychological violence three times and a victim of physical violence once.

Aaron

Aaron is a late addition to *The Fosters*. The character of Aaron is played by Elliot Fletcher, a transgender actor. He is featured in Season Four for a total of 10 episodes. He is mentioned in 14 episodes. The total screen time for the episodes used in my analysis totals seven hours and 42 minutes. Of this total time, Aaron features in 53 minutes and 11 seconds. His transgender identity is discussed 12 times throughout the episodes. Aaron also self identifies as male and a transman later on in the season. He is white, 19 years old, and seemingly identifies as straight judging by his interest in Callie although his sexuality is never discussed. His trans identity is both a source of narrative conflict and contributes to the story line in a major way in three episodes. Throughout the series he is misgendered 13 times and correctly gendered 62 times.

There is no point where someone engages in a wrong body discourse regarding Aaron's transgender identity. His birth name is used a total of four times in the season. There is also no discussion of Aaron's genitals. His physical attractiveness is discussed twice. Interestingly, his body is not revealed at all during this season. He is not in a romantic or sexual relationship with anyone, but he does become Callie's love interest towards the end of the season. Aaron is not the victim of psychological or physical violence throughout the episodes analyzed. See *Figure 1* below for comparison of Content Analysis results.

Content Analysis Results Table

Coding Questions	Sophia	Cole	Aaron
How many episodes character appears in or is mentioned in	41	11	14
Total screen time	2:17:43	1:10:28	53:11
Times character's transgender identity is discussed	43	16	12
Number of episodes trans identity is a source of narrative conflict	6	3	3
Number of episodes where trans identity contributes to story line in a major way	6	3	3
Number of times character is misgendered	46	13	13
Number of times character is correctly gendered	82	52	62
Number of times someone engages in a wrong body discourse	6	3	0
Number of times character's birth name is used	1	1	4
Number of times character's genitals are discussed	26	1	0
Number of times physical attractiveness is discussed	3	0	2
Number of episodes character's body is revealed	3	2	0
Number of times character is victim of psychological violence	8	3	0
Number of times character is victim of physical violence	2	1	0

Figure 1. Comparative results of all characters in Content Analysis

Content Analysis Summary

All three characters have a smaller amount of screen time because they are minor characters. Sophia is present in *Orange is the New Black* about twice as often as both Cole and Aaron put together. In general, Sophia is a more complex representation in terms of identity because she is Black and lesbian. As referenced in the literature review, McInroy and Craig (2017) state that many viewers find transgender representation lacking in different identities. Sophia is an improvement in this respect. Aaron and Cole are both white and heterosexual, which is a more common representation of trans people.

While all three are minor characters, each of them contributes to the storyline in a major way at least once. Their transgender identity also becomes a source of narrative conflict at least once for each character. As explored in the literature, a ‘born in the wrong body’ discourse is used in the series to explain the way transgender characters feel about their bodies. The enactment of a transnormative discourse (Johnson, 2016) to explain how the trans characters feel about their body makes Sophia and Cole more understandable to their viewers. An interesting exception to this trope is that it is not used with Aaron. Aaron is also a notable exception in the Content Analysis because his genitals are not discussed. In comparison, Sophia’s are discussed 26 times while Cole’s are discussed once. The exposure scene (Keegan, 2013) is present for Sophia and Cole. Sophia’s body is especially on display more than once. Sophia and Cole are both victims of psychological and physical violence at least once. Aaron is again a notable exception in this category.

The Content Analysis was used to choose the most salient episodes in each show for the Critical Discourse Analysis. Episodes were chosen because they were the most relevant in terms of showing strong examples of common transgender representation tropes. Episodes were also chosen if they were examples of more positive and/or complex representation. I now turn to the deeper results of the Critical Discourse Analysis below.

Critical Discourse Analysis Results

After narrowing down the most pertinent examples and scenes featuring the three characters in the Content Analysis (see *Figure 1* above), I used Critical Discourse Analysis for a total of 21 episodes between *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters*. There is a total of 11 episodes that Sophia is featured in and five each for Cole and Aaron. Each episode was selected because it was the most relevant to their transgender identity and/or their story arch in relation to pertinent milestones (such as Aaron's budding romance with Callie). The results of the Critical Discourse Analysis are summarized and discussed below.

The Political and Social Context of *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters*

Both shows started airing in 2013. In terms of gender politics, there are a few different aspects that helped prepare culture for more transgender representation. The cyclical dynamic between culture and representation addressed above is an important aspect of the political and social context of the two shows. Other transgender related films, such as *TransAmerica* (2005), were released earlier and did fairly well. LGBTQ shows that aired before 2013 include *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *The L Word*. Both of which received good ratings and were successful. The success of these shows

paved the way for other LGBTQ characters to be included in more mainstream media productions. The feeling of hopefulness around the LGBTQ community being represented in more media most likely sets the stage for shows like *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters* to be successful.

The launch of both shows also coincides with other important LGBTQ media events that could have only helped the overall goal of having more transgender in the media. Caitlyn Jenner, a former U.S. Olympic athlete, came out as transgender on national television in 2015. In addition, having the popular Laverne Cox cast as a character in *Orange is the New Black* must have added to the popularity of the show when it started. Chaz Bono also released his documentary about his transition in 2011. He publicly came out as a transgender man on television and has continued to be an outspoken advocate in the media. The public coming out of transgender celebrities also helps normalize transgender people in the media. The main impact of transgender celebrities being represented in media is that it creates opportunities in the form of fictional representations. Since culture and representation have a dynamic and mutually reflexive relationship, these representations also prepared North American culture to see more trans people on screen.

A landmark American court ruling also occurred in 2013 when a Colorado court ruled a six-year-old transgender student had the right to use the girls' bathroom at her school. This generated a lot of media attention and hype, signaling how important and divisive the 'bathroom problem' is. This is widely known as the Bathroom Bill and is a major part of the political and social context surrounding these shows. This court case was the first of many Bathroom Bills introduced throughout the United States. It marked

the beginning of a political and social battle to allow transgender people the right to use whatever bathroom most fit their gender identity.

The treatment of transgender individuals in prison is a political issue that has not been given adequate attention in the media, in the policies governing the prison system, and in academia. Sophia is an important character to analyze in terms of her representation because she is a Black transgender female in a women's prison, which is a rare representation. The character of Sophia can educate those watching *Orange is the New Black* about the reality of being transgender, a person of colour, and in the prison system. Sophia is a much-needed example of a more complex transgender representation.

In comparison, *The Fosters* deals with a different government institution: the foster care system. Through Cole, we see how transgender children are treated by the foster system. On a political level, the show deals with the pitfalls of the American foster system through the eyes of Callie and her new foster family. Callie is a white, cisgender female who is originally in foster care when she is taken in by the Fosters. Notably, she is rescued from the foster system with the intention to adopt her. In contrast, transgender Cole struggles to find a place that will take him in. However, including a transgender child at all in the storyline is a very powerful representation. It seems clear that the show intends to be inclusive of all sorts of foster care experiences – not just those of white, cisgendered, heterosexual children.

Since both shows started airing in the same year, they are influenced by the same world events and political climate. The producer of *Orange is the New Black*, Jenji Kohan, chose to turn Piper Kerman's memoir of the same name into a Netflix series. The

series itself is mainly told through Piper's perspective but does include the experiences and story lines of the other female characters. Politically, the show explores and represents a lot of powerful identities and experiences. In comparison, the co-producers of *The Fosters* are Peter Paige and Bradley Bredeweg. Paige especially is known for his political engagement and activism (Stulberg, 2017). It would only follow that his creation would take on some intensely political issues.

Orange is the New Black

The *genre* of the show is considered comedy, crime, and drama. It is a Netflix original, which means Netflix has the rights to the screening of the show itself. They are both the producer and platform for *Orange is the New Black*. This means they have the ultimate power over the show. The show is rated TV-MA, which means Mature Audience Only wherein some content may be unsuitable for children under 17. It is therefore designed primarily for adult viewing. One must also have a subscription to Netflix in order to watch *Orange is the New Black*.

Everyday Reader/Viewer

First of all, a typical viewer would be one that has a television and/or computer with internet connection and who subscribes to Netflix. The typical viewer would probably be watching the show as a comedy and not particularly for the drama or crime aspect. The comedic aspect of the show is particularly evident in the first season, which is what would get a typical viewer hooked. The average viewer may or may not have any knowledge or education about transgender people or transgender issues.

Text as a Whole

The show itself is mostly told from the perspective of the main protagonist, Piper Chapman. However, during the scenes in which the backstories or side stories of the other main characters are being explored, we sometimes get to see the story from their perspective. This is especially true after Season one.

Season One

Episode Three shows Sophia's perspective in the beginning of the episode in a flashback to her pre-prison and pre-transition life. The scene starts with her as a firefighter examining a burnt-out house. The scene then smoothly transitions into her current state of affairs. She goes from washing her face into the sink in the flashback to washing her face in the sink while she is in prison. This scene is a perfect example of the mirror scene as discussed by Keegan (2013) above (para. 22). Sophia stares at herself in the mirror in a scrutinizing way in both the flashback and in prison. In the following scenes, the angle and perspective switches back to Piper unless it is more of Sophia's flashback.

It is foregrounded that Sophia worked as a firefighter before her transition. She is treated as one of the guys in her firefighting flashbacks. During the first flashback, she steals the credit card information of one of the fire victims she was meant to be helping. This emphasizes how far she went to pay for her surgery. She is willing to take advantage of people who have already lost their possessions in a house fire in order to fund for her surgery. This is a pertinent example of the ways transgender people are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system (Campbell & Holding, 2015). Further along in this flashback, it shows her changing in the bathroom. This scene reveals the hot

pink undergarments she is wearing under the fire department clothing. Even pre-transition, her femininity is foregrounded.

In another prison scene, her bare body and breasts are foregrounded. In the next scene, the main protagonist Piper meets Sophia in the bathroom. Sophia mentions that she paid a lot of money for the construction of her vagina. It is consistently emphasized that Sophia is very feminine. Questions concerning Sophia's sexuality are also foregrounded. An interaction with a sleazy guard named Pornstache exemplifies this; in a scene where he is watching Sophia through the guard room window, he tells a fellow guard that having sex with her would be good since she would "know what a dick likes". Natalie Figueroa, executive assistant to the Warden, is representative of how the system views Sophia. Her attitude towards Sophia is that she should not have wound up in prison if she wanted to "keep his girlish figure". This is foregrounded via the conversation with one of the counsellors.

This episode also foregrounds the burden that Sophia's family has had to bear because of the choices she made. Her son Michael is angry and does not understand her transition. Her wife must raise their son alone because Sophia is in jail. A flashback shows a co-worker who has not talked to her since her transition, thereby rejecting her. All of these negative reactions are foregrounded throughout this episode. Sophia has sacrificed a lot to transition.

The more racist aspects of prison are evident but not foregrounded in conversation as racist. For instance, Sophia mentions that there is no dark skin tone make-up at the commissary but does not label it as racist. Another issue that is evident but not tackled

directly is the fact that the prison is making budget cuts around important things like medication. The reason Sophia is not on her usual estrogen dose anymore is because the prison, in a bid to save money, is switching to generic medication. A maintenance level dose is mentioned but the medical issues around switching someone to a maintenance level dose of hormones are not fully explained.

The actual recovery from Sophia's genital surgery is not discussed at all. She mentions that she spent a lot of money for her surgery, but there is no conversation about what it was like. Another aspect that is omitted is why Sophia's wife Crystal so desperately wants Sophia to keep her penis in the flashbacks.

On a scene-by-scene level, the first flashback scene centers around Sophia's pre-transition life as a firefighter. In one scene, Pornstache sexually objectifies Sophia. Bennett, another guard, voices the opinion that he thinks Sophia is freaky. In a scene further along into the episode, Sophia meets with the prison counsellor. She wants to go see a doctor but Healy, the counsellor, says it needs to be an emergency. She is desperate enough to pop the head off of a ceramic bobble head and swallow it in order to see the doctor.

A flashback scene features Sophia and Crystal navigating aspects of Sophia's transition. While Sophia tries on clothes, Crystal gives her tips on what she should be wearing to look like a classy lady. It is in this scene that Crystal also begs Sophia to keep her penis (both images present in *Figure 2* below).



Figure 2. Sophia's different stages of transition as shown in Orange is the New Black.

Retrieved from:

<http://www.zimbio.com/'Orange+is+the+New+Black'+Characters+Past+Present/articles/TeGAAvK6qxr/Sophia+Burset>

In a flashback following this scene, Michael and Sophia are in a shoe store shopping for Michael. One of Sophia's old coworkers comes into the store and greets Michael. When he realizes who Sophia is, he rushes out of the store. Michael gets angry at the situation and storms out. The two main points of this scene are to show that Sophia has not been readily accepted by her old friends and coworkers. The second point is to show how negatively Michael has reacted to Sophia's transition.

In another scene, Crystal comes to visit Sophia in jail. They discuss the fact that Michael refuses to come see Sophia. Sophia also asks Crystal to sneak estrogen into the prison. Crystal reacts very strongly against this. It is at this point that Crystal discusses how Sophia's transition has affected her and the family. Another scene shows a flashback to when Sophia was arrested. This scene makes it clear that it was Michael who turned her in to the police for credit card fraud. In current time, Pornstache offers to sneak estrogen in to the prison for sexual favours. She takes her agency back and refuses his offer. The scene ends with her looking in the mirror and plucking a hair from her chin.

On an agent-patient relations level, Sophia does have some agency in this episode. In her pre-transition state, Sophia is shown as being active. She has agency as a firefighter. Even when she is in prison, she takes steps to take her agency back by creating her own make up and feminizing herself. Sophia is also active in helping Piper navigate the trials of prison. In the scenes with Pornstache, Sophia is not the active agent. However, when the prison lowers her dosage, she does everything in her power to get it back.

On a presupposition level, the idea is taken for granted that Sophia 'became' a woman rather than always being a woman. It is Crystal who presupposes this in her conversation with Sophia when she says, "I put up with you becoming a woman". This is a good example of the taken for granted idea that transsexuality is a clear-cut journey from one gender to the other (Johnson, 2016).

An insinuation during a flashback scene involves Sophia and Michael; Sophia is trying on clothes for Crystal and they begin kissing. Michael walks in on them while they

are kissing and Sophia is dressed up in women's clothes. By the look on his face and the way he aggressively walks away, he clearly is not comfortable with Sophia's transition. During another interaction with Sophia, Crystal tells Sophia to 'man up.' This is obviously a very loaded connotation because of all Sophia has been through. A label used against Sophia by some of the other inmates is 'he-she.'

Episode Five features aspects of the storyline from Sophia's perspective. Due to budget cuts, Sophia's expensive hormones have been reduced to a maintenance level dosage. She is doing everything in her power to get hormones another way. Her physical withdrawal from her hormones is foregrounded in this episode. This is explained during a conversation with another inmate, Boo, at the beginning of the episode. Boo asks, "what exactly is going on with you anyway? Is it like menopause?" and Sophia answers with: "Same idea. Not enough lady juice. Skin gets loose, tits get saggy. Hulk gets angry". It is clear that hormones are both mentally and physically important to Sophia. It is also foregrounded that another inmate, Pennsatucky, thinks Sophia is an abomination because she is transgender. This is clear by the names Pennsatucky calls her (lady-man) and by the following interaction with a guard. Pennsatucky states that she doesn't want 'it' here, because "that's why this whole thing happened. God's angry that there's an abomination in the church, and if we don't get rid of 'it,' it's just going to keep happening". The interaction between religion and Sophia's identity as a transgender woman is key to the interactions she has with Pennsatucky and another inmate named Sister. Sister is an ex-communicated nun.

During a conversation with Boo, Sophia finds out that other transgender female inmates at another prison managed to get their bottom surgery completely paid for by the

State. This a backgrounded topic. A taken for granted assumption is that women naturally hate their bodies. For instance, Sister tells Sophia that “if you are truly a woman, you would never be happy with your body anyway”. This shows a presupposition that women cannot be happy with whatever their body looks like

Many of the scenes deal with Sophia trying to get her hormones back. During Sophia’s conversation with Boo (mentioned above), Boo tells Sophia that another aging inmate is on estrogen pills to treat menopause. This leads Sophia to talk to the other inmate, Sister, in the next scene. In a later scene, Sister tells Sophia she is not getting her hormones. Sophia gets angry when Sister claims that Sophia has guilt about leaving her family. The conversation around transgender people and religion is visited between Sister and Sophia. Sister, who is an excommunicated nun, tells Sophia that some tribal cultures regard transgender people as shamans. Sophia talks about the way she feels having to leave her family to fend for themselves. The main topic of these scenes is twofold. First, Sophia is trying to get her hormones no matter what. Second, she gains a friend in Sister. The third and less obvious topic is religion and transgenderism.

Sophia plays an active role in trying to change her hormone situation. She is an active participant in her fate during this episode, even though prison administration takes her usual dosage away from her. On a presupposition level, it is clear that Pennsatucky is representative of a poor, uneducated White person. She seems to hate Sophia based on these factors. It is taken for granted, then, that education plays a part in having ‘tolerance’ for transgender people.

On a words and phrases level, some connotations explored in the episode include when Boo and Sophia are having a conversation about her hormones, Sophia tells Boo that she doesn't "need them to buy the car, just pay for the oil". Later on, Sophia asks Sister why God had to give her this 'stupid penis.' On a label level, Pennsatucky calls Sophia both a 'lady-man' and 'it.'

Season Two

Scenes during **Episode Four** that feature Sophia are from her point of view. During this episode, the Black women have their own storyline apart from Piper's. At the beginning of the episode, the Black women are in the bathroom discussing their vaginas. Sophia walks in during their conversation and educates them about their 'second hole.'

The point of this episode that is foregrounded is that Sophia is an expert on vaginas. She states that she knows what she is talking about because she designed her own. When she walks in on the Black women trying to figure out their anatomy, she says "for the love of God, girls, the hole is not inside the hole". When one of the Black women says "for real?", she says, "for real. I designed one myself. Had plans drawn up and everything."

It is also foregrounded that the other inmates do not know much about their own anatomy. The actual reason why the women do not understand their own bodies is backgrounded. A key question to ask here would be why do the women not get adequately educated about their own bodies before Sophia? Another key aspect backgrounded is that men are not well educated either on female anatomy. This can be seen when one of the guards listening intently to Sophia's lecture goes back to his female

partner with what he has learned. An important omission in this episode is the fact that not all vaginas or female anatomy looks the same. Sophia teaches her anatomy lesson as though everyone looks exactly the same.

On a scene-by-scene level, one of the most prevalent scenes pertaining to Sophia starts when the Black women are trying to find their elusive ‘other hole’ (discussed above). Sophia walks in and educates them on how to find the hole they are looking for. At the end of the episode, Sophia is educating a whole group of inmates about their own anatomy.

Sophia is an active agent during this episode. She has knowledge about her own body and shares that with the other inmates. A presupposition in this episode is that it is natural for women to not know about their vaginas.

The first scene of **Episode Ten** that features Sophia is from her perspective. The visitation scene later on in the episode is also from her perspective. The angle is that of Sophia’s son Michael, who is coming to visit her for the first time in prison.

The fact that Sophia forgives her son is foregrounded. She seems to be very compassionate about the way he feels. When she is in the food line with another inmate, Red, she mentions that it has been a long time since Michael has seen her. Sophia says, “he turned me in” and Red responds with, “so, you’re strangling him at the beginning of the visit or at the end?” Sophia seems shocked, responding with: “he was 12 and angry. He’s been through a lot. I’m going to sit back, let him vent. You know, get it all out.” This example also foregrounds her lingering guilt around Michael. During the visitation scene, Michael’s level of discomfort is foregrounded. Sophia tries to reach out to him, yet

he is silent and barely meets her eyes. The reasons why Sophia so readily forgives Michael, even when he treats her terribly, are omitted. He shows no remorse for what he has done to his own parent.

The topic of the scene with Red discussed above is Sophia disclosing her emotions around her son coming to see her. This scene also lets the viewers know that it was her own son that turned her in for credit card fraud. Another key scene is when Crystal and Michael come to visit with Sophia. The scene centers around Sophia reconnecting with her family. This is important because this is the first time Michael has seen Sophia since he got her arrested. A presupposition on the scene-by-scene level is that Sophia should feel guilty for making Michael ‘act out’ because of his confusion.

Season Three

The **First Episode** in season three features scenes from Sophia’s perspective. It is Mother’s Day at the prison, which is a big deal for the inmates because they get to see their children. Sophia is an important part of this day in the prison because she is the best hairdresser. Her rule is that only mothers are allowed to get their hair done that day. However, she makes an exception for an inmate who is heartbroken (Morello). This makes Sophia look like a compassionate person.

Sophia’s importance as a hairdresser is foregrounded in this episode. The women are lined up out her salon door in order to see her before their children get there. A conversation between Morello and Sophia foregrounds her own confusion around her role as a parent to Michael. Morella asks “how does that work, with you being a lady-man and all?” After a snappy reply, Sophia answers that she and Crystal are sharing the

day. When Morello notes that it does not seem fair that Michael is spending Father's Day with Crystal's new boyfriend because he is not Michael's father, Sophia states that, "I'm not sure I am anymore either." There is evident confusion around the labels of 'mother' and 'father.'

Throughout the program, Sophia's relationship with Crystal and Michael is foregrounded. In a flashback scene, Sophia and Crystal are expecting Michael. They seem to have a comfortable, intimate, and supportive relationship with each other. In another scene, Michael and Sophia are sitting at a picnic table discussing Mother's Day. Michael feels bad that Crystal has to sit in the car by herself on Mother's Day while he visits Sophia. Sophia asks Michael about the pastor, with whom his wife has begun a relationship with while Sophia is in prison. Sophia had consented to this relationship at an earlier point in the show. Sophia wants to know what advice the pastor is giving Michael in terms of coming into manhood. Michael's discomfort around Sophia's transition is foregrounded when she mentions the fact that he should trust her shaving advice, since she has to shave everywhere. An odd piece of advice that Sophia gives Michael is the following: "when I was your age, my dad told find a real insecure girl and practice on her. That way, when you meet a girl you really like, you'll be good at it." Michael responds with "do you really want to be a lady in a world where men do that?" Sophia responds that she does.

One point mentioned but downplayed is the fact that Morella feels it is okay to ask Sophia invasive questions because she just 'doesn't know.' It is assumed that Sophia is just supposed to educate her. In the scene where Michael is visiting Sophia, he tells her that he does not need another mother. Sophia just accepts this and the conversation

moves on. A very curious point that is backgrounded are Sophia's beliefs around gender. She continues a cycle of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity through her conversations with her son, such as the advice regarding getting an insecure girl to practice on. One would think that she would have more enlightened beliefs around gender because of the struggles she still goes through.

The scene topics revolve around Sophia and how she navigates Mother's Day. This can be seen in her conversation with Morella, her visit with Michael, and the flashback to when Crystal was pregnant. The visit with Michael features Sophia sharing some wisdom about manhood with him. She finally gets the chance to play the role of active parent to Michael. Due to her ability to parent him in this episode, Sophia is active and in control. On a presupposition level, the belief system around Mother's and Father's Day is implicit throughout the episode. It is taken for granted that only a female parent can be celebrated on Mother's Day. Sophia struggles with her place as a mother on Mother's Day.

The connotations behind Mother's Day and Father's Day are strong. In addition, the meaning of the word 'father' holds strong connotations for Sophia who feels she no longer can fill that role for Michael. A label used against Sophia is 'lady-man.'

In **Episode Eight**, Sophia speaks with Crystal over the phone about Michael. This scene shows Sophia's perspective, as well as Crystal's. They are both trying to figure out why Michael is acting out the way he is. The episode also shows Mendoza's perspective. Mendoza is one of the Spanish inmates who asks Sophia if Crystal can start giving her son Benny a ride to visit. When Michael and Benny start hanging out at home, Mendoza

and Sophia get into a disagreement about whose fault it is that their sons are acting out. The angle is that Sophia believes that Michael is completely innocent while Benny (Mendoza's son) is a bad influence.

The prison hires new guards who are not sensitive to Sophia's status as a transgender woman. She explains to Crystal that the guards ask "what are you? Do you still have your you-know-what?... I should hang a slip of brochures on my back for 'frequently asked questions about being transgender.'" The guards' ignorance is obvious in this episode. The topic of respecting women also comes up in Sophia's conversation with Crystal because Crystal has gotten wind of the bad advice Sophia gave Michael. Crystal does not approve of the fact that Sophia told Michael he should find an insecure girl to practice on. Sophia's insecurities around not being able to parent her son becomes clear through her conflict with Mendoza. She blames Mendoza and her son for Michael misbehaving. She is not willing to see that it may be her own son who is the bad influence.

One issue that is backgrounded is the difference between Sophia and Crystal when it comes to their beliefs around what respecting women looks like. This is briefly mentioned in their phone conversation; however, it is not discussed. Sophia is clearly feeling powerless when it comes to parenting her son in contrast to the previous episode. On a presupposition level, the guards clearly believe Sophia is not quite human when they ask her 'what' she is.

The topic of the phone conversation between Sophia and Crystal is their son. Sophia tells Crystal that she needs to shut Michael's attitude and bad behaviour down.

Later in the episode, Sophia is in the medicine line with Mendoza. They get into a discussion about how they feel about parenting while they are trapped in prison. On an agent-patient relations level, Crystal is the one with agency because she is the one raising Michael. Some connotations present in the episode include the following: ‘do you still have your you-know-what’ and “I might have changed but I’m still his father.”

In **Episode 10**, the scene where Mendoza is looking in on Sophia’s family visit is from Mendoza’s perspective. It switches to Sophia’s perspective from this point on. The scene where Sophia is attacked in the bathroom is intercut with another scene where Alex, a fellow inmate, is also attacked in another bathroom. This intercutting heightens the action in an intense way. The angle is that they are both defending themselves from attack.

In one of the more intense scenes, Sophia is assaulted in the bathroom. This attack is foregrounded in the show. She is minding her own business and is then accosted by Mendoza and her friend Aleida. It is emphasized that Sophia is physically very strong. She shoves Mendoza harder than she means to after Mendoza shoves her, which ends up sending Mendoza head first into the wall. A subtle plot point is that Sophia is sensitive about her place as Michael’s parent. It is backgrounded because Sophia is not honest with herself. She instead blames Mendoza’s son for Michael misbehaving. This is why she gets so upset when Mendoza harasses her in the bathroom. Some aspects that are omitted are the roots of Michael’s behaviour. Although she does not say it, Sophia is most likely triggered by being told she is in the wrong bathroom by Mendoza. As explored in the literature review, the space of the bathroom can be a vulnerable place for a transgender person to be (Sandercock, 2015).

One scene shows Mendoza walking by the visitation room. She looks on and sees Sophia visiting with Crystal and Michael. This scene fuels Mendoza's anger towards Sophia. The scene then switches to Sophia's visit with her family. The main crux of the scene is that Michael is misbehaving for some reason. Sophia tries to be a parent and it clearly does not work. In a following scene, Mendoza is livid at Sophia because Sophia tells Crystal to stop bringing Benny. This scene is important because it shows the progression of Mendoza's frustration with Sophia. This will eventually lead to the Spanish women ganging up on Sophia. The critical scene where Sophia is attacked in the bathroom begins with Mendoza telling her she is in the wrong bathroom. They get into an argument about mothering. Once again, Mendoza states that she is a real mother while Sophia is not. This leads to their physical altercation.

Crystal seems to be the only one with agency in this entire situation. Sophia tries to be tough on Michael, which does not work. Michael also has some agency to leave when he gets in trouble from Sophia. Mendoza insinuates that Sophia is not a real mother when she says that she is a "ferocious pissed off real mother, but you wouldn't know nothing about that, would you?" Mendoza makes use of connotation when she tells Sophia that she "ain't nothing real."

The framing of **Episode 11** is that the Spanish women, mainly Aleida, are rallying against Sophia. The perspective is mainly Sophia's, but also split with Mendoza. At the beginning of the episode Aleida is telling everyone that Sophia attacked Mendoza. The tension escalates from there.

In the foreground is the fact that even though Sophia was defending herself, Aleida is making others turn on her by referring to her as a 'man' and a 'tranny.' Aleida is whipping up hysteria against Sophia. When Aleida is verbally attacking Sophia, the key aspect she is attacking is Sophia's transness. She is using the fact that Sophia is transgender to dehumanize her and make her appear like a monster. Sophia's angry and aggressive reaction is foregrounded when she hears the Spanish women spreading rumours about her. It is backgrounded that no one defends Sophia.

On a scene-by-scene level, the fear mongering against Sophia begins in this episode. When Taystee, a fellow inmate, sees Mendoza's black eye and asks what happened, Aleida says, "that fucking tranny is what happened." Mendoza gives Aleida a look as if to stop her, but Aleida says, "what, you didn't get locked up with a bunch of women so you could get beat on by a man." Taystee and Black Cindy come to Sophia's defence, saying that she does not cause problems. Aleida says that there is something wrong with Sophia, that perhaps "his hormones are off." She gets everyone in a panic by exclaiming that no one is safe.

Later on in the hallway, a Spanish woman and a Black woman are spreading rumours about Sophia with each other. Mainly, the Black girl says that she heard Sophia is off her meds and that her penis is growing back. Sophia hears this and tells them that they heard wrong. She threatens to "go all UFC on their asses" if they keep spreading rumours. In this scene Sophia also discovers that Taystee has stopped going to her salon. The inmates are boycotting Sophia's salon in general, thanks to the hatred that Aleida has provoked

The following comment is made about Sophia: “I don’t know what’s going on with that dude, but he’s raging out.” This language misgenders Sophia and the connotation is that she is a danger to everyone around her. She is also labelled a “fucking tranny” and a “he-she whatever.”

In **Episode 12**, the perspective is split between the Spanish women and Sophia. They come in and ask Sophia invasive questions, demanding to see her genitals. After the attack the episode is from Sophia’s perspective. The main plotline in this episode is that Sophia is a victim of the fear mongering started in the last episode by Aleida.

In the foreground of this episode is the Spanish women’s belief that Sophia is hiding out in a women’s prison for the sole purpose of having an easier time. When Sophia will not show them her genitals, they get violent with her and attack her. One even goes as far as to try to stab her with scissors. The violence of this scene is foregrounded. Instead of jumping in to handle the situation, a new guard runs off to get Caputo, who is the acting warden of the prison. Sophia later tells him that the guards are not properly trained to intervene in such a situation. The inadequate reaction on the part of the guards to protect Sophia is foregrounded. The episode foregrounds Sophia as a victim of violence who is powerless. This scene is one of the most salient in terms of following the common tropes found in transgender representation. As the literature shows, violence is often used as a warning to those who transgress the gender binary.

In a later part of the episode, it is shown that the privatization of the prison has led to an emphasis on profit making, not health and safety of the inmates. Another dramatic foregrounded aspect of the episode is Sophia’s slow-motion walk from her bunk to

solitary confinement. She is in the lead, surrounded by three guards escorting her there. One aspect that is backgrounded is the fact that the prison itself will not protect Sophia or go out of their way to make sure she is not attacked again. One key aspect omitted in this episode: why are the inmates who attacked Sophia not punished? This is never addressed during the episode.

A particularly aggressive inmate named Reema and some other inmates come into Sophia's salon with the intent of giving her a hard time. She states that the Spanish women have been saying that Sophia still has a penis. Sophia says that it is none of their business. Reema wants to force Sophia to show them her genitals. They block her from walking away and attack her when she does not show them. After the incident, Sophia is in Caputo's office talking about the attack. He acknowledges that he knows she has been having a rough time for a while. His solution is to put Sophia under more surveillance in case she gets attacked again. Sophia threatens Caputo with legal representation and scandalous headlines about her mistreatment.

In another scene, Sophia is in line to get food. She is wearing a head wrap because her wig was torn off and her face is bruised. Mendoza stops what she is doing when she sees Sophia's face. She clearly feels guilty about what happened to Sophia. The topic of this scene is to show that guilt. When Sophia goes to visit Sister, she talks about how everyone acts cool about her being transgender most of the time. Then Sophia says, "then you realize you're still a freak, and you'll never be one of them." They continue to talk about how Sophia should handle the situation.

In the following scene, one of the prison administrators tries to stick up for Sophia. This backfires and Sophia ends up in solitary confinement. This is meant to foreground that the prison administration does not care about the health or well-being of the inmates. Finally, the scene at the end topicalizes the fact that Sophia is headed to solitary confinement. She is sitting in her bunk looking at the scars on her face in the mirror when the guards come for her. It is clear that the guards do not think this is right. Sophia composes herself and goes with them on her own accord. Mendoza comes out of the cafeteria just in time to see them escort Sophia past. Sophia stares her down while Mendoza looks down at the floor. The scene ends with the solitary door closing on Sophia. She breaks down and cries once she is locked in.

Some ideas that are taken for granted include that for the prison administration, “nobody cares about the long term.” This is in terms of what will happen when Sophia gets out of solitary confinement. Some insinuations include, “people don’t like what they can’t understand” and “why do you have to make everything so hard.” The last one insinuates that it is Sophia’s fault that she is being attacked. During the attack, Reema uses scare quotes to describe Sophia as ‘pretending to be female.’ The connotation is that Sophia is not actually female. Sophia is labelled as a ‘she-male’ and a ‘freak.’

Season Four

The perspective in **Episode Four** is that of Sophia when the scenes are about her. Sophia has been largely absent in the overall storyline until now because she has been in solitary confinement. Sophia is having a tough time in solitary as she tries to get Caputo to come see her. The physical and emotional pain that Sophia continues to go through are

foregrounded in this episode. The first time the audience sees her, Sophia has a dead look in her eye. Her face is blank and her gaze is unfocused. Her emotional state and the experience of solitary confinement is really foregrounded here. In addition, the fact that Sophia can still muster up a fight after everything she has been through is also foregrounded. For instance, she floods her cell to get Caputo to come down and speak with her.

Sophia looks extremely exhausted in solitary. She receives food from an unidentified guard and asks to speak to Caputo. The guard ignores her and closes the window. She drops her food in the toilet and then gets the idea to flood the cell. The topic of this scene is the dehumanization of solitary confinement. Caputo comes down to see Sophia as she has successfully flooded her cell to get his attention. The emphasis in this scene is that Sophia feels like she has been down in that cell for months. Caputo lies about the fact that Crystal agrees that Sophia should be in solitary confinement. It is at that point that Sophia realizes she is fighting a losing battle with Caputo. She takes her shirt off and uses it to further plug the toilet. Finally, Sophia lights her cell on fire to continue her war against Caputo. Throughout this episode, Sophia does fight very hard to get some agency back. When the guards ignore her plea for Caputo, she takes matters into her own hands by flooding her cell and then lighting it on fire.

During **Episode 12**, Sophia is finally released from solitary confinement. The aspects of this episode that include Sophia are from her perspective. She is having a rough time reintegrating back into the regular prison atmosphere.

Sophia's empty stare and shuffling, beaten-down steps are emphasized. Her entire demeanour has changed. The graffiti and transformation of her entire salon is also emphasized when she walks past it. She seems weak until she encounters Mendoza in the bathroom. At this point, she gets some fight back in her and tells Mendoza to get out of her face.

The topic of the first scene Sophia features in regards her transformation in solitary confinement. She looks emotionally drained and has stopped taking care of herself. When she stops at her old salon, she notices that the Spanish inmates have taken it over. The words 'Burset has a dick' are written across the outside of the salon (Burset is Sophia's last name). She continues to sadly shuffle away. In a later scene, Sophia walks into the bathroom. There are bandages around her wrists where she cut herself in solitary. Mendoza walks into the bathroom and says, "you're here," which Sophia responds with, "am I?" Mendoza asks Sophia if she needs anything. Sophia responds with, "don't make the mistake of thinking just 'cause I look weak that I am. Now get the fuck out of my face," and enters the stall. The topic of this scene is that Mendoza does indeed feel bad for what happened to Sophia. Sophia also still has some fight in her. Finally, the scene at the end shows Sophia in front of her salon looking in. Mendoza happens to be walking by when this happens. She kicks all of the Spanish women out so she can help Sophia put her wig back on. Mendoza is her ally at this point. The audience is encouraged at this point to identify with Mendoza while still sympathizing with Sophia for what she has experienced.

Mendoza is seen as the active one in this episode. She takes an active role in helping Sophia get back on her feet. She comes to her aid during the salon scene. One

presupposition on the scene-by-scene level is the statement that “you are criminals, and you deserve nothing.” It is taken for granted that criminals deserve to be treated like they are literally nothing.

Summary of *Orange is the New Black* Critical Discourse Analysis

The representation of Sophia falls into a few of the common tropes discussed in the literature. Sophia and her wife both describe her transition as ‘becoming a woman’ which falls into the transnormativity trope discussed above (Johnson 2016). Sophia is also the victim of physical violence when she is attacked and of psychological violence when she is put in solitary confinement for her ‘own protection.’ Her representation in the show starts on a positive note because her identity is one that is rarely represented. Her inclusion with the Black inmates does not help her, however, when she is isolated by other inmates for being transgender. Ultimately, it is her transgender identity that leads to her harassment and abuse.

The Fosters

Cole

The *genre* of the show is family/romance/drama. The rating for the show is TV-14, which means that ‘some’ material may not be suitable for anyone under 14. The genre is more family friendly than *Orange is the New Black*. In addition, because it deals with a wealth of issues targeted towards teens, it is more likely to have a younger viewership than *Orange is the New Black*.

Everyday Reader/Viewer

A typical viewer would be one that has a television and/or computer with internet connection and who subscribes to Netflix or has cable access to one of the networks *The Fosters* plays on. A typical viewer would also find teenage drama/ family drama interesting.

Season 1

The perspective of **Episode 12** is from Callie's perspective. Callie has run away from the Foster's home and has now been put back in the foster care system. In lieu of juvie, she has been placed in an all-female group home called Girls United to await her fate regarding whether she will end up with the Fosters again or not. Callie is wary of the other members of Girls United because she does not feel she belongs there. The group home is where she meets Cole, who is the first transgender man introduced into the series.

The points that are foregrounded in this episode are the following: viewers are introduced to Cole, Cole is masculine appearing but has a high voice and androgynous features, Cole claims that he hates Girls United. The scene in which a fellow group home member, Becka, uses Cole's birthname in a derogatory manner is also foregrounded. Interestingly, Cole comes off as bossy and angry in this episode. He is not immediately likeable as a character. He describes himself as a transgender male, and as being born in the wrong body. The fact that Cole binds his chest is also foregrounded in the scene where Callie accidentally walks in on him wrapping an Ace bandage around his chest.

Interestingly, although Rita (the adult mentor in charge of Girls United) is clearly supportive of Cole and tells the others to refer to him with his preferred pronouns, she collectively refers to the group of them as girls. She does not take the time to use Cole's pronouns when everyone is in a group. In addition, the viewers never find out why Becka is so hostile to Cole being transgender. This is omitted. A presupposition on an episode level is the taken for granted explanation that Cole was born in the wrong body. This is assumed to be the explanation for why Cole feels the way he does.

On a scene by scene level, certain topics are foregrounded. In the scene where Callie enters the group home, the topic of the scene is for the viewers and Callie to find out why everyone is there. Cole is in the group home because he was 'picked up' for stealing and prostitution. We do not learn he is transgender until a later scene in the kitchen, in which Becka uses his birth name. In a later scene, Callie is participating in group therapy with everyone and Becka again states that Cole is "addicted to being a boy." Perhaps the most important scene in this episode is when Callie walks in on Cole while he is putting his ace binder on to flatten his chest (which counts as an exposure scene, discussed above). Cole shoves Callie, and Callie responds by shoving Cole harder than intended. Cole falls backwards and shatters the shower. This is the first time Cole's body, and evidence of the fact that he is transgender, is shown during the show.

Cole seems to have some agency during the scenes where Becka attacks him. He responds to her aggressively, standing up for himself and insulting her by calling her a bitch. One insinuation during the group therapy scene is when Daphne tells Cole "you may be a boy but you ain't no butch." This insinuates that she may not truly see Cole as

male, and she definitely does not see him as hyper masculine. Connotations include the phrase ‘born in the wrong body’ and labels used ‘transgender male.’

Episode 13 is mainly from Callie’s perspective. The only part of the episode that is shown from Cole’s perspective is during the Girls United field trip. Cole is standing in line for the men’s washroom and is accosted for being in the wrong line. Callie is not present for this scene; therefore, it is from Cole’s perspective.

The scene where Cole is standing in line for the men’s washroom is foregrounded, and the emotionality behind the scene is intense. While Cole is minding his own business, an unidentified, older woman tells him that he can’t stand in that line just because it is shorter. The scene itself is intensified more by the arrival of a security guard who tries to drag Cole away. Another man calls Cole a freak and tells him to ‘stay in his lane.’ A minor scuffle breaks out between Kiara and the man who calls Cole a freak. This bathroom interaction is at the forefront of Cole’s storyline during this episode. It is this scene that exemplifies the bathroom problem as explored by Sandercock (2015) and discussed in the literature review.

At the Girls United group home, the other members of the house put the blame on Cole for ‘making things hard on himself.’ The attitude that Cole is really the one responsible for these incidents is foregrounded during this scene. Another aspect that is foregrounded during this scene is Callie’s habit of being an advocate. She sides with Cole against the other children, defending him.

A third aspect emphasized during this episode is the fact that Cole seems conniving. For seemingly no reason, he takes Callie’s contraband phone away from her

and attempts to end her relationship with Brandon via text. He has an absolutely devious look on his face as he types away on the phone. This foregrounds that idea that Cole is not a nice person.

During the aforementioned bathroom scene, it is mentioned that transgender people have rights around bathroom usage. However, this point is backgrounded and not further explored. A key point that is completely omitted is the fact that the woman felt the need to police Cole in the first place. She is a complete stranger that chooses to publicly shame Cole instead of either asking him quietly or leaving him alone. The scene makes it appear as though the bathroom is a one-person occupancy. It would have been much easier for her to leave him alone. The explanation for her actions is completely omitted.

On a scene-by-scene level, the bathroom scene is really about the transgender bathroom issue. Transgender people frequently get accosted and gender policed around gender usage. This scene revolves around this issue. The following scene at the house is about the others believing that Cole brings it on himself. A scene following this shows that the girls still believe it is Cole's fault, as Gabbi asks Cole if he minds if she "uses the men's room." The topicalization of the scene in which Cole takes Callie's phone is that Cole is trying to sabotage Callie's relationship with Brandon. The reasoning is not made clear.

A presupposition on a scene-by-scene level is when the woman who accosts Cole in the bathroom line tells him that him being in the men's washroom line is "confusing for the other students." This idea is taken for granted and the woman does not feel like she has to explain what she means. An insinuation on this level is when the girls at the

group home tell Cole that he makes things hard on himself. They are suggesting he brings all of this harassment on himself by being transgender.

On a word and phrases level, Kiara calls Cole sticking up for himself his ‘trantums.’ By this, she means that Cole passionately sticks up for himself when issues around his identity as a transgender man come up. He is also labelled as a freak by the guy who harasses him in the bathroom line.

The perspective in **Episode 14** is from Callie. Callie is framed as an understanding person who hears Cole out even after discovering his dishonesty when he takes her phone. This angle is further exemplified through the foregrounded aspects of the episode.

The fact that Cole has been deceptive is foregrounded. His actions when he takes Callie’s phone and breaks up with Brandon while pretending to be Callie exemplifies this. When he sneaks out in the night and Callie catches him is more evidence that Cole is being sneaky. During this scene, Cole’s chest is also foregrounded because his flannel is open and revealing. It is also foregrounded that Cole is so impatient to get hormones that he is willing to take the risk with street hormones. Further along in the episode, these same hormones also cause a seizure because he takes them without proper medical monitoring. Another aspect foregrounded in this episode is that Cole’s parents do not accept him. They kicked him out of the house because they did not approve of him liking girls or being transgender. They even go as far as to refuse to come see him when he is in the hospital.

A backgrounded point in this episode is the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. The two sometimes get intertwined in the show. In this episode, Cole tells Callie his parents believe that him being a boy is just code for him being a lesbian. This issue is mentioned but backgrounded and not explained. Another problem is the discussion around hormones. Cole mentions that his body is reacting negatively to being off hormones. The physical and negative aspects of hormone replacement therapy withdrawal are touched on but never elaborated on.

There are certain topics that take precedent in some of the scenes throughout the episode. In the scene where Callie catches Cole retrieving something in the dark from the back yard, both Cole's deceptiveness and his desperation to get back on his testosterone are emphasized. After this incident, Cole explains that he is taking street hormones. This is the main topic of conversation. He also explains his situation with his parents to Callie.

After Cole gets out of the hospital, it is emphasized that Rita cares a great deal about Cole's safety. This is shown by the gentle way she helps him to his bed while letting him know she is glad he is okay. In this scene, it is also emphasized that she tried to get Cole's parents to come and see him but they refused.

Season Two

The perspective is Callie's in **Episode Eight**. She has come back to Girls United (GU) for the weekend to help out with Community Day. Community Day is when the children in the house invite their neighbours to come over and learn about the group home program. One of the main plot points in this episode is that Cole has started a fling with a new girl in the house.

Cole's short-lived romance with a new roommate is foregrounded in this episode. The audience now sees Cole in a physical and romantic relationship with Devonee, a new addition to Girls United with a bad attitude. The fact that Callie, Cole's biggest ally in this episode, herself confuses Devonee for being gay when romantically involved with Cole foregrounds the issue of confusing sexuality with gender identity because she assumes Devonee is gay for Cole.

Cole is so taken with Devonee that he is willing to give up going to the LGBT group home he has been wait listed for. Callie tells Cole that if Devonee really loves him, she will want him to go to the new group home. The fact that Cole is willing to forego this important step in his transition for Devonee emphasizes that Cole just feels lucky that someone likes him back.

It is clear from Devonee's comment regarding Callie that there are some racial elements to foster care that are just not explored in the series. For instance, Devonee calls Callie the pretty white girl who was in Girls United for 15 minutes and came back to be shown off. None of this is discussed further besides Devonee's comment. The racial element of foster care is backgrounded.

One presupposition on an episode level is the sentence 'make yourself the person you want to be.' This taken for granted idea is that the term 'person you want to be' is used as a stand in for gender. It is this taken for granted idea that gender makes you the person you want to be.

The scene-by-scene topicalization where Callie is in GU for group therapy is that Cole is not particularly happy to be transferred. In the following scene at GU, Callie

walks in on Cole making out with Devonee. This scene is significant because it is Cole romantically involved with someone who seemingly likes him back. In a later scene, Callie and Kiara are discussing Cole's relationship with Devonee. Kiara and Callie both wonder if Devonee is gay, again confusing sexuality with gender identity. Following this, the next significant scene has Callie confronting Cole about using street hormones again. The topic of the scene is that Callie is concerned about Cole's safety and does not want him to have another seizure. All of these scenes cumulatively establish Callie's caring friendship with Cole. In addition, Cole is seen to be struggling with his transition journey in different ways throughout these scenes. He is torn between his fling with Devonee and taking steps to transition.

Still on a scene-by-scene level, Callie finds out that Cole is planning on running away with Devonee. Callie convinces him that if Devonee really cared about him, she would encourage him to go to the new group home. In the following scene, Cole and Callie come into the room where Kiara and Devonee are. Cole announces that he wants to go to the group home. It is then made clear Devonee has been using Cole and does not particularly like him. She tells him that Cole will never be a boy, that he will always be a freak. After Devonee leaves, Callie comes into Cole's room to console him. He wonders aloud whether anyone will ever love him.

On a presupposition level, Callie describes Cole going to this LGBT group home as helping him to 'become the man he was supposed to be.' This is an example of a born in the wrong body trope. It is assumed that Cole will 'become' a man, instead of him already identifying as one.

There are quite a few connotations at play in these scenes. For example, when Callie and Kiara are talking to each other about Cole, they use quite a few terms that carry special meanings. For instance: “Devonee’s gay?” and “Since Cole identifies as a boy.” Cole also states that “no one here treats me like a man.” Additional spoken connotations include: “become a boy” and “will anyone ever love a freak?” Freak is also a strong label present in the episode.

Season Three

The perspective of **Episode Four** is mainly Callie’s. Cole, post-transition, casually sees Callie at the beach and they catch up. This is framed as a chance meeting. The perspective is mainly from Callie’s point of view, as Cole enters the scene and leaves while the scene still continues. The emphasis in framing this scene is how Callie views Cole’s transgender journey. Callie is also framed as a defender of Cole and educator when A.J. asks about Cole’s scars, ignorant of what being transgender means.

Cole’s transition is a major foregrounded aspect of this episode. In particular, the physical aspects of his transition are emphasized. The first thing that Callie points out is how Cole’s voice has deepened. The second aspect of Cole that is emphasized is how he is an activist. He talks to Jude and Connor about the LGBT prom he helped set up. This automatically sets him up as someone who is passionate about LGBT issues. It is also mentioned that Cole is going to this prom single; therefore, he has yet to find a partner.

Cole’s chest surgery scars are a major point of emphasis during this episode. It is the first time Cole takes his shirt off (see Figure 3 below). Once Cole takes his shirt off,

this cues A.J. up to make both a confused facial expression and a comment about the scars. Further to this, Cole's masculinity is foregrounded but also compared to A.J.'s.



Figure 3. Beach scene with Cole, Callie, and A.J in Season 3, Episode 4: More Than Words. Retrieved from: <https://www.theworkprint.com/the-fosters-review-more-than-words/123>

While Cole's attraction to Callie is a focal point of the episode, it is made clear during the prom scene that Callie is not in the least bit interested in Cole on a romantic level. However, she argues that it is because she sees him as a friend. It is alluded to, via physical cues and the way the shots are filmed that Cole is somehow different than A.J. However, this is a backgrounded point that is not expressed overtly. Similarly, when Callie and A.J. joke around about Cole liking Callie and thinking it is a date, it is taken

lightly as a joke. As though Cole could never be a serious love interest. This is also backgrounded.

On an episode level, Cole's journey between his pre-transition self in previous seasons to his current self is omitted. Cole does not even talk about his surgery at all. It seems as though the show did not want to show Cole mid-transition; instead there is a neat before and after impression. On a presupposition level, "being born in the wrong body" is assumed to be the natural explanation for transgenderism. Callie explains this to A.J. and insinuates that this is the dominant discourse to explain the way Cole feels about his own body.

During the scene where Cole shows up to pick Callie up, he is wearing a suit and a bowtie. Lena and Stef are quick to compliment him on how handsome he looks. A.J. acts very cool with Cole, although it is clear he is attracted to Callie. By the way Cole looks at Callie, it is clear that he also is attracted to Callie.

Callie's rejection of Cole is the topic of this scene. During the prom scenes, Cole slow dances with Callie and she rejects him when he goes to kiss her. In a following scene, Cole confronts Callie about going with him as a pity date. He also accuses her of not liking him because he is transgender. Callie makes it clear that him being transgender has nothing to do with. Instead, she sees him as a friend.

Cole is somewhat active in this episode. However, it is Callie that has the most agency to explain Cole to A.J. On a presupposition level, it is taken for granted that Callie knows exactly how Cole feels and identifies. It is also taken for granted that his top surgery was the next logical step in Cole's transition. A connotation explored in the

episode is when Cole tells Jude that there is ‘power in labels.’ Two labels used by Callie to explain Cole’s identity to A.J. are ‘transgender’ and ‘born in the wrong body.’

Aaron

Both the *genre* and *everyday reader/viewer* sections are the same for Cole as they are for Aaron since both are in the same show.

Season Four

In **Episode Three**, the perspective is Callie’s and the angle of this episode is that Callie is a little lost in her life. This opens her up to a chance meeting with Aaron, to whom she is immediately drawn. Aaron’s physical appearance is foregrounded when Callie first meets him. This is especially because Callie watches him come in to the coffee shop and plug his laptop in. It is an interesting scene because there is no obvious indication that he is transgender. It is mostly his physical appearance that is foregrounded—a leather jacket, tattoos, a sparse amount of facial hair, and spacers in his ears all come off as a ‘cool’ appearance.

It is clear that Aaron is meant to be seen as smart as he is studying law books. When Callie asks him, he tells her that he is getting a law degree to work for a non-profit. In sum, all of the physical aspects of Aaron make him appear cool and smart. In addition, since he is aiming to work at a non-profit it would seem that he is caring. Many of his physical characteristics and markers are associated with masculinity. He even owns a sleek motorcycle. When Callie and Aaron go on their bike adventure, Aaron kisses Callie. Their instant connection foregrounds their obvious attraction to each other. One thing that is backgrounded is the reasons why Aaron hates having his picture taken.

A second topic at the scene level is that of Callie getting to know Aaron. This scene establishes Aaron as useful to Callie because he is pursuing a law degree and interested in working at a non-profit organization. She is trying to help her former foster brother get his case reconsidered. He is the perfect acquaintance for her at this time.

The beach scene features Callie taking pictures of Aaron. When Aaron sees the pictures, he is surprised that they look good. Callie calls him handsome, which leads to Aaron kissing her. Notably, Callie does not pull away. On their way back to the café, Callie asks him to stop by a house she used to live in. She is comfortable enough with him to open up to him about her mom's death. This has not been a topic she has really discussed with anyone else. It means she trusts Aaron implicitly.

One insinuation made during this episode is when Aaron says he has "never seen himself like that," referring to the pictures Callie has taken of him. If a viewer is watching this episode for the first time, they would not know what Aaron means. However, Aaron is alluding to his transgender identity.

The perspective of **Episode Six** is Callie's. The angle of the episode is that Aaron is helping Callie try to figure out a way to help her former foster brother get his case retried. They have been closer since they met at the café. An obvious plot point is that Aaron cares a great deal about Callie. He is very interested in her life. It is clear that they are both physically and emotionally comfortable with each other. When Callie shows Aaron a file on Kyle's case, they are standing quite close together. It is also foregrounded that Aaron trusts Callie. He discloses to her that he is transgender. When Callie mentions that she knows Cole, it is foregrounded that she has been and continues to think of herself

as a transgender ally. Aaron's transition (and surgeries) are briefly mentioned but then backgrounded. This representation is different than that of Cole, who desperately wanted to begin his transition. Aaron barely speaks about it.

On a scene-by-scene level, Aaron walks into the garage in the midst of Callie's emotional breakdown. As she is cutting up her senior project, the camera angle features Aaron walking in through the hole Callie has put through her presentation. The angle of the camera is very fitting. After this, Callie talks about how hard it is to look back on her past and experiences in foster care. Aaron discusses his own difficulties with himself while growing up. This is the scene in which he discloses that he is transgender. Specifically, he talks about how he sees how sad he was when looking back on old pictures of himself.

On a words and phrases level, one key point that Aaron makes is that not all transgender people know each other. He says, "you're giving me the 'I have a friend' speech? You know we don't all know each other right?"

Episode 10 is presented from Callie's point of view. The angle is that Callie and Aaron have continued to work together to help Kyle in his case. They have had continued contact with this shared cause.

Aaron's unpleasant way of speaking to Callie is foregrounded in this episode. This is the first time Aaron has been anything but charming and soft spoken to Callie. He gets angry at her for breaking into Doug Harvey's house. This foregrounds that he cares about Callie's safety.

During the scenes where Aaron is around A.J., A.J. looks at him as though he does not like him. During this same time Mike asks A.J. what is up between Callie and Aaron. This foregrounds the idea that Aaron might actually be a threat to A.J.'s relationship with Callie. The way A.J. reacts to Aaron calling Callie cute by being aggressive also foregrounds this jealousy. When the three of them get into an argument, Callie goes after Aaron to comfort him.

During a conversation after the fight, Callie tells A.J. that Aaron is transgender. A.J. states that he would not have gotten so jealous if he had known that Aaron was transgender. This foregrounds the idea that some people believe transgender people are not 'real' men or women. This sentiment also reinforces the trans\romance dilemma as explored by Abbott and the fact that transgender people are often depicted as people who could never have a sex life or healthy relationship. In this conversation Callie also tells A.J. she would consider dating Aaron if she was not going out with A.J. This is the first time Callie voices how she actually feels about Aaron.

The entire episode is premised on Callie trying to get signatures for a foster reform care bill to get on the ballot. The issue of foster care and foster care law is backgrounded to the rest of the storyline. A presupposition in this episode is when Callie is angry at A.J. for picking on Aaron's size. She says that he is obviously sensitive about his size. It is taken for granted that being short is an issue for Aaron.

On a scene-by-scene level, the tension between Aaron and A.J. starts to mount when they help Callie set up a booth at a festival. When Aaron comments on how much Callie and her sister look alike, Mike and A.J. share a look. This scene is about the

jealous tension building from A.J. and everyone coming together to help Callie. Sophie, Callie's sister, makes a point of saying that she thinks Aaron is cute.

In another scene, Aaron is watching A.J. try to get someone to put their signature on the petition. When the woman walks away, Aaron tells A.J. "couldn't close huh?" A.J. looks at him in a way that tells the audience he is getting fed up with Aaron. After this, the two boys and Callie are standing around the booth. When Callie says she needs a new petition, Aaron is surprised that she has filled one up so quick. He follows this up with saying, "if we were all as cute as you I'm sure we'd be on our fourth petition too." A.J. gets very angry and aggressive with Aaron. He also tells Aaron that he is half his size on a good day, so to watch out. Callie intervenes between them, saying that A.J. does have a point about Aaron hitting on her but also telling A.J. to shut up. When Aaron walks off Callie goes after him. The point of this scene is to finally bring the unspoken tension between A.J. and Aaron to the forefront. It also shows that Aaron is indeed a threat to A.J.

A presupposition present in this episode is the way A.J. takes out his jealousy. It is taken for granted that he would act out aggressively, threatening to hurt Aaron, because he is jealous. It is assumed that this is a natural way for a man to act who is jealous and angry.

One insinuation present is during the song Brandon performs with this band in the midst of the drama. The lyrics go as follows: "you're going to be forced to choose between what you need and what you want." These lyrics are being performed in the midst of A.J. and Aaron fighting over Callie. An additional connotation is when A.J.

makes fun of Aaron's size by calling him 'little man' thereby emasculating him; this is why Callie gets so angry with him.

Episode 11 is from Callie's perspective. In a previous episode, Callie got into a verbal altercation with Troy. Troy's grandmother was allegedly killed by Kyle, her former foster brother. Troy is angry that Callie is trying to re-open the case. Callie is getting more embroiled and in trouble trying to help Kyle with his case. Aaron and A.J. have already had one falling out over Callie. Callie has also outed Aaron as trans to A.J.

It is foregrounded that Aaron is the first person that Callie calls when she is in a crisis. He shows up to support her. When Aaron finds out she has outed him to A.J., Aaron explains that it is not her story to tell. He also says that it is a really vulnerable thing for him to tell her. Callie is understanding and receptive to what he has to say. It is foregrounded that this is a healthy exchange. This is in comparison to Callie and A.J.'s unhealthy exchanges when they are angry with one another.

On a presupposition level, A.J. says that if he had known Aaron was trans, he never would have said those things. He is referencing the fact that he called Aaron little man. Apparently if he had known Aaron was transgender he would have been nicer.

On a scene-by-scene level, the topicalization about most of the scenes with Aaron and Callie include him supporting her through the trauma she just experienced. Aaron is making coffee at the hospital and A.J. goes over to speak with him. A.J. apologizes to him and admits he should not have said the things he did. When A.J. states he should not have made the crack about Aaron's size, Aaron looks confused. Then A.J. states that he

did not know Aaron was trans. Aaron looks uncomfortable that Callie has disclosed him as transgender.

In a following scene, Aaron confronts Callie about outing him. He tells her that she cannot go around telling people that he is transgender. He states that “people literally get killed for being trans, so it’s a really vulnerable thing to share with someone.” She understands and is receptive to what he says. Aaron takes back his agency when he confronts Callie about outing him. He is very clear that his transgender identity is not her story to tell.

Episode 18 is from Callie’s perspective. Aaron and Callie are still working together to help the Kyle Snow case. Aaron has asked Callie if she wants to accompany him on his trip back home. The angle is that his home life is clearly not comfortable for him. Callie will act as his buffer between him and his family.

It is foregrounded that Aaron has an unstable relationship with his family. His anxiety is at the forefront of the scenes when they are at his house (as seen by his expression in Figure 4 below).



Figure 4. Aaron and Callie arrive at his parent's house. Retrieved from: <http://www.j-14.com/posts/the-fosters-aaron-elliott-fletcher-hate-speech-139553>

The fact that Aaron's parents have not accepted his transition is also foregrounded. This is evidenced by the use of his birthname and the fact that all pictures of Aaron in the household are before he transitioned. Aaron's brother Evan also asks if Callie is a lesbian, again conflating sexuality with gender identity. On the other hand, his brother uses Aaron's preferred pronoun.

In the foreground of the episode is Aaron's tumultuous relationship with his father. He has the most negative reaction to Aaron's transition. During the scene at his father's birthday dinner, Aaron's father describes his transition as mutilation. Callie defends Aaron to his father. This scene frames her as an ally to Aaron. Aaron also makes it clear that he has chosen his family despite the way they treat him. In the foreground is

the fact that he has made the choice to keep his family around despite their inability to call him by Aaron and use his preferred pronouns.

Callie manages to make Aaron's mother come around to his transition. This scene further foregrounds her as a passionate ally to both transgender men she has met throughout the series. In these scenes where Callie is defending Aaron, their budding romance is also in the foreground. Aaron's upbringing and childhood is alluded to but not explored. His entire history is backgrounded, which is much different than how the show treats Cole. Another aspect of the show that is backgrounded is the gender expectations around being a mother or father. When Callie is in the kitchen with Aaron's mother, his mother talks about the differences between having a son who has a child vs. a daughter who has a child. This is not explored further. Finally, the show omits what surgeries Aaron has had.

On a presupposition level, there are a few points of conversation that take certain ideas for granted. When Callie is defending Aaron's transition, she states that "all he did was make sure that what he looks like on the outside matches who he is on the inside." This mindset assumes that surgery was necessary to match who Aaron was on the inside. Finally, when Callie is talking to Aaron's mom, she mentions that she has lost a daughter.

This episode has key scenes for the first time around Aaron's transition. In a later scene when Callie and Aaron have arrived at Aaron's house, he gets out of the car looking distraught. He looks towards his house nervously as they walk towards it. When they enter his house, Aaron's mother greets him warmly with a hug. It is not until she

uses his birth name that the scene becomes tense again. It is also clear in this scene that Aaron and his father are uncomfortable around each other. They do not know how to act.

The scene then cuts to Callie looking at all of the pictures on the mantle. She notices that there is not one picture that features him after his transition. One particular picture she focuses in on is Aaron and his dad golfing. His dad looks down at him proudly as he is holding a trophy and smiling at the camera. Later on, all of them are having dinner at the table. Aaron's mother calls him Allison again before correcting herself and telling Callie that Allison was her mother's name. Aaron's mother asks if he sees his ex-girlfriend around school. Aaron responds that she got into the sorority scene. Aaron's dad makes a crude joke, saying that he guesses Aaron won't be getting into that. Aaron is clearly hurt by this comment. Aaron then pulls a book out he has gotten for his dad's birthday. His dad barely looks at it before putting it down and focusing on something else. The mood at dinner is increasingly tense.

Further along in the episode, Aaron's brother notices that he has a tattoo. His dad clearly disapproves and eventually asks, "haven't you mutilated yourself enough?" At this point Callie intervenes angrily. She argues that surgery is not mutilation, that Aaron is a man, and that all he did was make sure what he looks like on the outside matches who he is on the inside. At this, Aaron's dad says, "on the inside? On the inside? Underneath all of 'this' is my daughter, Allison." When his dad says 'this,' he points to all of Aaron. While this conversation is going, Aaron is closing his eyes, hard. He is clearly uncomfortable and hurt by what is happening at the table.

After dinner, Callie visits Aaron. Aaron gets angry at Callie for defending him because she argued with his parents. Aaron states that he made a choice to include his family in his life despite what they are like. The topic of this scene is Callie trying to make Aaron see that the way Aaron's family treats him is not right. Another topic is that Aaron has chosen to keep his family around despite the pain they cause him.

In another scene, Callie gets into conversation with Aaron's mother. She describes that they have been trying to understand Aaron and his transition. His mother says that "she was such a beautiful girl. It's been really hard, I've lost a daughter too." His mother then describes how she knows she made his life hard. She believes she has caused him pain. In the end, she says that she wishes he had not done something 'so permanent.' A key aspect of this scene is when Aaron's mom says she does not know who Aaron is. Callie has to remind her that he is the same person he has always been. This scene explores how navigating life with transgender children can be confusing for some parents, even when they do not mean to cause their children pain.

After this conversation, Callie goes upstairs to apologize to Aaron. During this scene Aaron kisses Callie. This is the topic of the entire scene. In the scene the next morning, everyone is in higher spirits. Callie has retrieved coffee and donuts for the family. Aaron comes downstairs and sees the three of them interacting happily. Callie also gives Aaron's mother a picture she had taken of him on the beach. She smiles down at it and calls him handsome. Importantly, she then puts the picture up on the mantle. When Aaron sees that she has put his picture up, he smiles happily. In the car, Aaron and Callie kiss again. Aaron offers her an out by saying that it does not have to be a thing.

Since she responded with a kiss, it is alluded to that this romance is just beginning. This is a more positive note in the plot.

Unfortunately, when Aaron's father refers to Aaron mutilating himself, he is insinuating that surgery is akin to mutilation. In addition to this, Aaron's father insinuates that he does not see Aaron as his son via his comments at dinner. In particular, the comment that 'underneath all of this is my daughter.' On a words and phrases level, the words 'mutilated yourself enough' is a strong connotation that Aaron's father does not accept the surgical aspects of his transition.

Summary of *The Fosters* Critical Discourse Analysis

The representation of Cole shows similar tropes as Sophia's representation. When Callie walks in on him changing out of his binder, Cole clearly does not consent to having anyone look at his body. However, the scene at the beach in which he takes his shirt off for the first time is notably different because he *chooses* to show his body. This scene is important and positive in that respect. Cole is also the victim of psychological and physical violence. In general, Cole's representation breaks the common tropes in a few ways, but falls into common tropes in others.

Aaron is a unique representation because he does not fall into common transgender tropes. For example, his body is not revealed during the episodes he is featured in. His genitals are not discussed and he is not the victim of psychological or physical violence. Perhaps most importantly, he becomes a viable love interest for a main character. His character quite successfully navigates Abbott's (2013) previously discussed trans/romance dilemma by constructing him as a likeable, complex character.

In sum, the representation of Aaron is much more positive than the other characters, and indeed, in some respects even groundbreaking.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion and Conclusion

The literature has shown that most transgender representation has been overwhelmingly negative and simplistic. However, through a mixed methods approach of Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, this research has shown that representation is moving in a positive direction. Although the three representations in the two shows studied still have their flaws, I discuss below how they are each working to move transgender representation in a more positive direction.

The character of Sophia Burset is an important inclusion because she is representative of what it is like to be in prison as both a transgender woman and a Black woman, as borne out by Rosenblum (1999), Browne (2004), Campbell and Holding (2015), and Tarzwell (2006). Further, echoing the work of Laura Mulvey, the negative aspects of her representation include the fact that she is somewhat objectified by both the viewer and those around her. She is exposed, and a victim of psychological and physical violence. On a positive note, Sophia struggles to retain her agency throughout her stay in prison. When her estrogen is taken away, she tries to actively get it back. When she is targeted by the Spanish women, she attempts to protect herself. There is some complexity to her character as she struggles with what it means to be a father and a mother. As a person of colour, she also adds to a transgender landscape that is missing more Black representation.

An aspect of Sophia's gender expression is that she performs her femininity blatantly. As discussed above, Butler (1999) and West and Zimmerman (1987) all argue

that gender is an everyday performance. Sophia makes a point to do her make-up and hair each day. She performs her femininity with a zeal that is not seen with the other inmates around her. When she is the object of the gaze of others, she accepts it. She is gazed at by the other inmates and guards as an object of curiosity and, at times, hatred. This aligns with Mulvey's theory of how the "cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking" (Mulvey, 2010, p. 202). The viewer, in turn, is invited to look at Sophia to discern 'what she is.' There is recognition in the fact that she has some of the same struggles as other inmates. However, it is clear that she also has unique struggles based on the fact that she is transgender.

When it comes to Cole, this representation fell into many of the aforementioned stereotypes. His experience in foster care seems representative of what another young transgender man would go through. He is misgendered and questioned constantly by the children in the group home with him. Cole's experience with gender policing in the bathroom is also representative of current social/political struggles around the right for transgender people to choose which bathroom they use. A key aspect of Cole's character is the post-op shirtless scene on the beach. This is significant because it is one of the first representations on such a popular show of a transgender man showing off his body. Importantly, every character in the scene stares at his exposed chest scars when he takes off his shirt. It is during this scene that Cole feels like he is able to take control of his gender performance due to the fact that he can show his masculinized chest. Since having a masculine chest allows one to take their shirt off in public, Cole's surgery allows him to take part in this 'male performance.' Cole is finally able to participate in this rite because his body falls within "the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse" (Butler, 1999, p. 12).

The viewer is also invited to gaze at Cole as an object of curiosity (Mulvey, 2010). The gaze in this scene is powerful and used as an educational tool, as the viewer's questions are answered in the following conversation between Callie and A.J. Callie's exchange with A.J. educates him.

It seems as though the more positive aspect of Cole's representation is that the writers chose to include a transgender character. Although Cole is not particularly complex, his character's experiences seem to be representative of what it would be like to be a young transgender man in foster care. Cole's character follows a transnormative trajectory in that he is White and heterosexual, and he relentlessly pursues his transition (Johnson, 2016). The positive aspects of his character seem to be his very presence in the storyline. However, a key moment in the show features Cole confessing his feeling for Callie and being rejected because she sees him as just a friend.

Aaron's character is more complex than Cole's. Aaron is introduced on the show as a stealth transgender man. He appears in Callie's life for a while without the audience (or Callie) finding out about his past. This allows the viewers to get to know him as a 'biological' man before they find out his status as a transgender man. This is a more complex representation in itself because most transgender characters are outed right away. His performance of masculinity is also not scrutinized because he is assumed to be a cisgender male. In addition, it is foregrounded that he is a real threat to A.J., Callie's current boyfriend.

Compared to the other two characters, Aaron has a different representative trajectory. Aaron's body is not revealed at all. His genitals are also not discussed, in

comparison to Sophia's (hers are discussed 26 times). One of the most significant aspects of the representation of Aaron is that he is depicted as a legitimately viable love interest to Callie. The storyline makes their attraction and growing romance completely believable. This challenges Abbott's (2013) trans/romance dilemma that most representations fall prey to. It remains to be seen how their love story will play out in future seasons, but it merits emphasis that this depiction breaks new ground in terms of the televisual representation of transgender individuals.

Aaron's interaction with his family shows a more complex family dynamic than that of the other transgender characters. For instance, Cole's family has completely rejected him. Sophia has a strained relationship with her wife and son. It is clear that Aaron still loves his family, and they love him. However, his father finds it hard to understand his transition. During her conversation with Callie, his mother explains that she feels as though she lost a daughter. While this conversation is painful, it is a healthy and complex conversation to have with a parent who is trying to understand their transgender child. Indeed, the entire episode moves towards more complex representation because it does include more in-depth and meaningful conversations

Overall, the inclusion of the three characters in their respective shows are a step forward to more equitable and positive transgender representation. Both shows do a good job of representing the current relationship between how the state treats transgender inmates and transgender children in foster care. The state is depicted as not being sensitive to those who are transgender. For example, Sophia is thrown into solitary confinement 'for her own protection.' The inmates who attack her are not brought to

justice. The administrators at Girls United struggle to find an LGBT group home for Cole. The shows acknowledge these issues by foregrounding these scenes.

An important aspect of these two shows is their inclusion of complex issues and conversations. Creators of media often shy away from including anything that would be considered transgressive. To their credit, the creators of both shows do include tough conversations. Cole struggles with feeling as though no one will ever love him. Sophia experiences the administration taking her usual estrogen dosage away from her, is victimized by fellow inmates, and survives solitary confinement. Finally, Aaron chooses to remain as a part of his family, despite their lack of understanding and respect around his gender identity. While there is always room for improvement, these shows have taken important early steps towards more equitable representations by including real, complex issues that transgender people face.

On the other hand, all three characters perform their gender as clearly masculine men or feminine females. As Butler (1999) notes, the “possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (p. 192). By transitioning across the binary from male to female or female to male and then choosing to perform according to the popular notions of what a man or woman should act like, the gender binary is not only upheld, but further entrenched. While Aaron, Cole, and Sophia may be accepted as men or women, their subsequent upholding of the gender binary does not in fact disrupt the gender binary itself.

As representation moves in a positive direction, there is an antithetical conundrum created by what Butler (1999) sees as the desired end goal of gender performance. In the current state of transgender representation, transgender characters are fighting to be recognized as gendered people. To be recognized as a gendered person, to be seen, seems to involve falling into a binary, sex-based category. These transgender characters are generally allowed to cross this binary and be seen as the men or women they feel they are by those around them. However, Butler emphasizes the fact that gender

is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative characters and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination" (pp. 192-193).

In other words, these representations serve to sustain social performances that do nothing to challenge the current gender binary. There is, then, a paradox between this and Butler's answer to the end of gender trouble – which is to disrupt the very foundations of the discourse surrounding gender. The move toward more complex representation does allow these transgender characters to be recognized as gendered intelligible subjects. However, it does not, at this point, lead us closer to displacing the "very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (Butler, 1999, p. 203).

As more transgender characters are included in mainstream representations, it will be an important task for scholars to continue to critically analyze these representations.

More importantly, producers and creators need to continue to add transgender characters to their narratives. The inclusion of more nuanced and complex transgender characters will challenge the notion of what it means to be a man or a woman. In so doing, the reciprocal relationship between culture and representation may become more progressive.

In my research, I set out to examine, through contemporary theories of gender and representation, how *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters* represent their fictional transgender characters throughout their narratives. By examining their trajectories, I found the three characters to be generally more complex than past representations. These representations do indeed enable the viewers to see the transgender person as a gendered subject. However, there is still an inclusion of common tropes including: the bathroom issue, violence, the trans/romance dilemma, transnormativity, transgression, and exposure scenes as explored in the literature review. However, the representations of Cole, Aaron, and Sophia are more complex. These shows represent a move in a more positive and complex direction for the representation of fictional transgender characters.

This research area is an important area of future study. The representation of both fictional transgender people and the real-life experiences of transgender people should be a continued area of emphasis for cultural producers and creators. Academics and critical thinkers should be vigilant that this move towards more positive and complex representation continues. Finally, the representation of different kinds of gendered ideas may potentially achieve Butler's (1999) end goal of understanding gender as a social construct that constrains us. These representations do not confound the "very binarism of sex...exposing its fundamental unnaturalness" (Butler, 1999, p. 203). Ultimately,

however, they do allow Cole, Aaron, and Sophia to *be seen*, and being recognized as a gendered subject is an important move in the right direction.

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Appendix A

Series Coding Sheet Side 1 used in Content Analysis

Series Coding Sheet		
	1. Character played by transgender or cis actor/actress	A. Casting
	2. How many episodes character physically appears in	B. Visibility
	3. Episodes character is mentioned in	
	4. Total screen time	
	5. How many times characters' transgender identity is discussed	
	6. Character Name	C. Identity
	7. Gender Identity	
	8. Race/ethnicity	
	9. Age	
	10. Sexuality	
	11. Number of episodes where persons trans identity is source of narrative conflict	D. Relevance of Character
	12. Number of episodes where persons trans identity contributes to storyline in a major way	
Season:	Character:	Basic Information

Appendix B

Series Coding Sheet Side 2 used in Content Analysis

	13. Number of times character is misgendered	E. Embodiment
	14. Number of times character is correctly gendered	
	15. Number of times someone engages in a wrong body discourse	
	16. Number of times characters birth name is used	
	17. Number of times trans characters genitals are discussed	
	18. Number of times characters physical attractiveness is discussed	
	19. Is the trans characters body revealed?	
	20. Are they in a romantic relationship?	F. Social Interaction
	21. Are they in a sexual relationship?	
	22. Are they a victim of psychological violence?	
	23. Are they a victim of physical violence?	

Appendix C

Episode Coding Sheet Side 1 used in Content Analysis

	1. How many minutes is character physically present	A. Visibility
	2. How many times is character mentioned while off screen	
	3. Total screen time (minutes:seconds)	
	4. Times trans identity is discussed positively	
	5. Times trans identity is discussed negatively	
	6. Times trans identity is discussed neutrally	
	7. Is trans persons identity source of narrative conflict?	B. Relevance of Character
	8. Does trans identity contribute to storyline?	
	9. Times misgendered	
	10. Times correctly gendered	C. Embodiment
Season: _____ Episode #: _____ Character: _____ Episode Title: _____ Total time character is present: _____		Basic Information

Episode Coding Sheet

Appendix D

Episode Coding Sheet Side 2 used in Content Analysis

	11. Times characters' birth name is used	Embodiment
	12. Times someone engages in a "wrong body" discourse	
	13. Times trans persons genitals are discussed	
	14. Physical attractiveness of trans person is discussed	
	15. Is the trans characters body revealed?	
	16. Who does trans person interact with?	D. Social Interaction
	17. Are they in a romantic relationship?	
	18. Are they in a sexual relationship?	
	19. Are they a victim of psychological violence?	
	20. Are they a victim of physical violence?	

Vita Auctoris

Jack McLaren was born in Windsor, Ontario in 1992. He attended St. Joseph's High School in Windsor and continued his education at the University of Windsor. He holds a B.A. (Hons.) in Psychology as well as a B.A. (Hons.) in Communication, Media and Film. Continuing as a graduate student at the University of Windsor, he is currently a candidate for a Master's degree in Communication and Social Justice.

In his spare time, Jack enjoys playing hockey, reading, writing, and gaming. He hopes to continue his pursuit of knowledge and social justice activism in further graduate studies at the Ph.D. level.